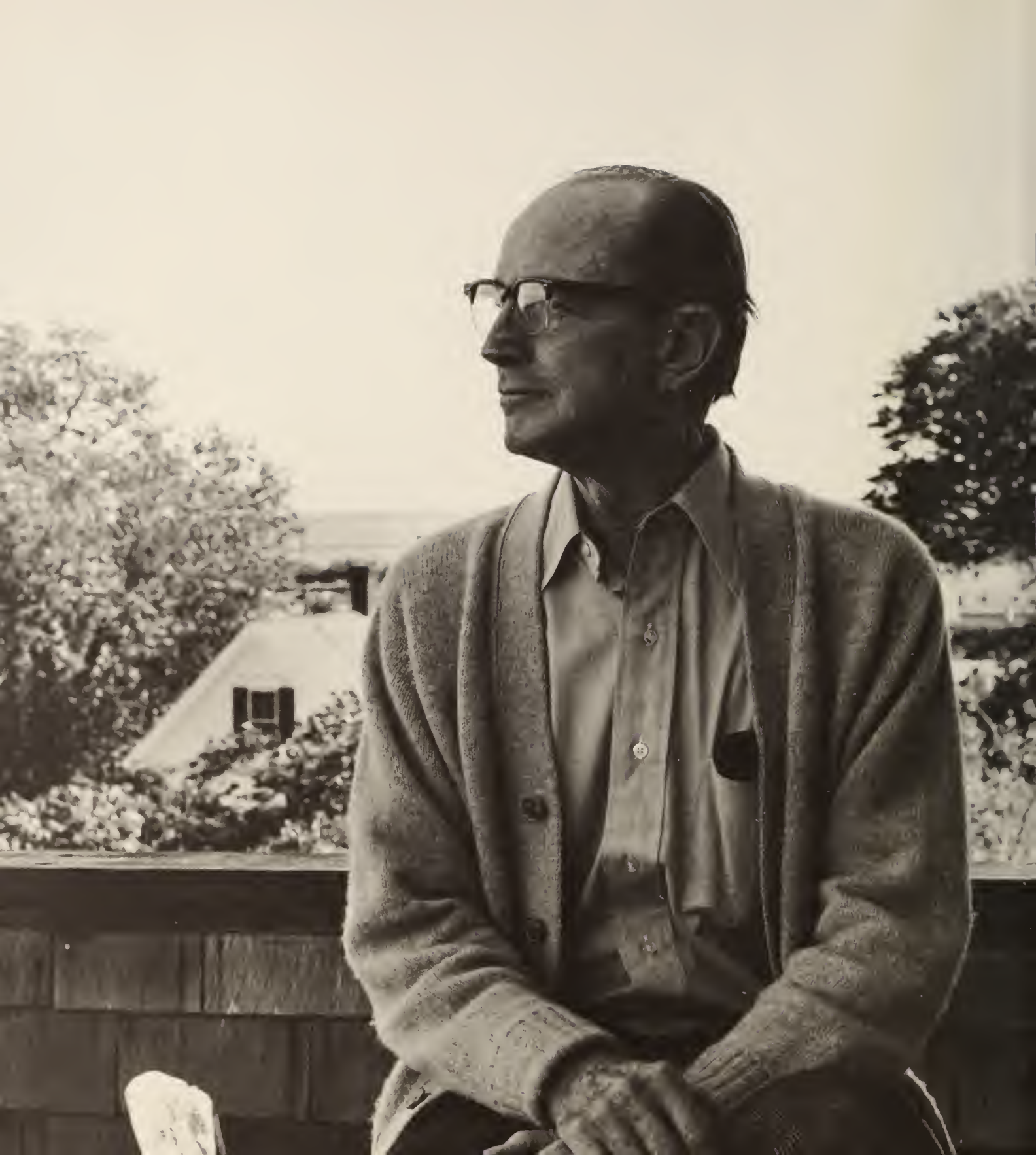
MYRON
STOUT

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

http://archive.org/details/myronstout00schw



Sanford Schwartz

with an introductory essay
by B. H. Friedman

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Schwartz, Sanford, 1946–
Myron Stout: February 5–April 6, 1980, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Bibliography: p.
1. Stout, Myron, 1908– —Exhibitions. I. Stout, Myron, 1908– II. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
N6537.S76A4 1980 741.9'73 79-25111
ISBN 0-87427-028-6

Copyright © 1980 by the Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021

Dates of the Exhibition:
February 5 to April 6, 1980

Typeset in Monotype Walbaum by the Press of A. Colish, Inc., Mount Vernon, N.Y.

Printed by The Leether Press, Yarmouth, Maine

Designed by Carl Zahn

Back cover: 43. Untitled, *1976*

Page 1: 49. Untitled, *1976-79*

Frontispiece: Myron Stout, 1979. Provincetown, Mass.

Photograph by Rachel Giese.

Preface and Acknowledgments

Among the many reasons for this catalogue and the exhibition that accompanies its publication, perhaps the most important is the need to alter an evaluation of its subject first made in 1959, and still widely held. Twenty-one years ago, Sidney Tillim accurately wrote of Myron Stout that he "is not underrated, but his work is still certainly too little known." For almost a quarter of a century Stout has been one of the special figures in American art: a painter whose black-and-white abstractions have stayed in the minds of people who have had little occasion to find out much about the man who made them, his stature or his aspirations; a painter whose work has been sought after not only by discerning collectors, but by those with a partisan involvement in the fortunes of contemporary art; and a painter whose pictures, by virtue of his loving regard for whichever medium he uses, the certainty of his hand and mind, the simplicity of his means and the complexity of his ends, have given something immediate and strong to each new wave of young artists that has encountered them.

Tom Armstrong, speaking out of his own enthusiasm, and with the backstage encouragement of his curators Barbara Haskell and Patterson Sims, proposed a full-scale catalogue and exhibition. For paving the way for this double event, I would like to thank them, as well as Flora Miller Irving, than whom the show and catalogue had no more consistent well-wisher. I would also like to thank the lenders, many of whom parted with works of some fragility; Doris Palca, whose flexibility of mind saved at least one tight moment, and whose shepherding of the people it took to produce this book is responsible for its quality; Bob Mates, who faced a waterfall of late demands to photograph the works and met the challenge of making sensitive reproductions of them; Bernard and Annie Walsh, Linda Eisinger, Dana Cranmer, Pat Westlake, Charles Anderson, Helen Otis, Sheila Schwartz, Rachel Giese, Katherine Maartens, Jim Leggio, Orrin Riley, Barbie Schecter, and Nancy McGary for their collective industry and advice on the many levels of preparation and polishing. Myron Stout, in all the hours he spent answering questions, and in his willingness to be called upon to help clarify any issue, no matter how small, was the model of perspicacity and considerateness that anyone who has dealt with him would imagine him to be. Richard Bellamy, Stout's dealer for almost as long as the artist has been showing, wrote more letters, placed more phone calls, made more trips, and researched the whereabouts of more works in behalf of this project than he can be adequately thanked for.

B. H. Friedman, who has known the painter and admired his work for years, written about him on an earlier occasion, and continually urged others to look into his art, has, with equal generosity, supplied this catalogue with an appreciation, tucked into which is a remi-

niscence. It is hoped that with this introduction, the selections from the artist's voluminous journals, the note on those journals and the chronology I have contributed and, of course, the paintings and drawings themselves, Myron Stout will become, to update Tillim, much better known and only more highly rated.

Sanford Schwartz

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgments
page 5

Introduction
page 9

Plates
page 17

Chronology
page 63

A Note on the Journals
page 74

Excerpts from the Journals of Myron Stout, 1950 to 1965
page 79

Selected Bibliography
page 89

Catalogue of the Exhibition
page 91

Fig. 1. *Untitled*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 20 × 16 inches. Private collection. (Not in exhibition.) The first "black-and-white."

Introduction

It is no accident that it has taken until the age of seventy-one for Myron Stout to have his first major retrospective. The contemporary art world moves quickly and noisily, often swerving in great arcs of fashion. To "market" an artist requires, typically, a large body of work—large both in number and (since World War II, particularly in the United States) in size—a great flow of production which feeds dealers, collectors, critics, curators, and the media. If an artist has a talent for self-promotion, so much the better for business.

Stout has been unobliging. He has worked slowly, quietly, and unswervingly, moving always from the living experience of nature itself (the mountain, the dune, the valley, the tree, the human body) and the most natural man-made things (the garden, the breakwater) toward a sort of contemplative abstraction. In Stout's case, the term purist abstraction, would be both inaccurate and pretentious. Rather, he should be placed in the modern European tradition from which grows the mature work of such artists as Cézanne, Brancusi, and Mondrian—visual sages who, though they produced more work than Stout, agonized like him, often reclusively, over the primal shape and structure of *things*—and, in every sense, the *illumination* of things. These artists, in their search for the essential—whether, for example, in Cézanne's studies of fruit or of the dynamic thrust of Mont Sainte-Victoire; in Brancusi's of the ovoid forms of head, unborn child, and birth (or creation); even in Mondrian's explorations of the resolved tension between vertical and horizontal—all transcend national boundaries. In the same way, Stout transcends geographical and critical location.

It is difficult, though not impossible, to relate Stout's work to recent

American art. Unlike the dominant artists of his own generation, he is involved with scale but not size, with image but not "gesture," with expressiveness but not expressionism, with light but not conventional color. There are none of the violent storms or pyrotechnics displayed sometimes in the work of the Action Painters who best personify that label. With Stout, heavy weather doesn't exist. It is always seemingly calm and "atmospheric." And yet the light in his subtle graphite drawings is as carefully modulated as in a Rothko. Without color—or, stated positively, with black and white *as color*—he achieves something like Franz Kline's deliberate ambiguity between ground and image; and in such paintings as the untitled ones belonging to The Museum of Modern Art and the Carnegie Institute, something like the serenity and poise of Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt.

Unlike our younger generations, he has no interest in popular or topical iconography, or in the cold isms of inflated intellectuality. The temperature of Stout's work always hovers humanly—"impurely"—at about 98.6 degrees. Still, there is a real link with the artists of the sixties and seventies. In subject matter, it is his commitment to *thingness*, that most American of commitments; and, in style, to understated laconicism, possibly Western (i.e., Texan) in origin, but more likely Western in the larger sense (i.e., Greek).

In his journals—in 1950!—he speaks presciently and sympathetically of Newman's "dryly lyrical quality." In interviews almost thirty years later,* he speaks in a related way of Agnes Martin and "the sensi-

*Unless otherwise indicated, all direct quotations of Myron Stout are from Katherine Maartens' interviews, listed in the Bibliography. I want to thank her and Stout for permission to use and re-edit this material.—B. H. F.

tiveness of grid lines which deny flatness and create an imaginative space —not a representation at all"; and of Dan Flavin "working with very intense sensation—actually the sensation of light so intense that you can hardly class him as a minimalist. There's a richness that he handles with classical simplicity." But Stout is no more closely connected to these generations than to that of, say, the still younger Joel Shapiro, whose work, in its intensity and ambiguous scale, shows similarities to Stout's. The point is that Stout straddles all these generations.

One can understand why his work looks so completely at home within the context of a 1961 group show at Richard Bellamy's Green Gallery (fig. 2), where it appeared along with sculpture or near-sculpture by Oldenburg, di Suvero, and Samaras, all placed under exposed spotlights and among radiators and pipes. Stout's work has, in one sense, a loft sensibility, a plainness, a thingness again; and, in another, something beyond this, a presence as romantic and idealistic and open as the West from which he comes, or as the crescent-shaped harbor of Provincetown, Massachusetts, where he now lives.

In Stout's graphite drawings particularly, there is both a masterful and magical quality, a sense of mystery about how they are made and what they mean. To some extent, he explains their making: "When I start drawing, I work with the black and white areas as well as their enclosing lines. Jogging them back and forth. Feeling my way. Pushing a black area up. Starting out with a black area across the bottom. And then something else one place, and then erase and mark out, and shift without actual drawing, more like in the painting process. So actually, I work both ways in drawing—both in the linear way and in the more

Fig. 2. A 1961 Green Gallery, New York, group show with *Untitled* (Number 2, 1956) flanked by, from left to right, works by Oldenburg, Samaras, di Suvero and Oldenburg. Photograph by Rudolph Burckhardt.

painterly way of working with areas, in masses of black and white."

But the meaning remains within the images themselves. Though Stout will talk about an impulse or an urge in response to landscape, bodyscape, or myth, these add little to one's understanding. There is really no need for decoding or searching for deeper meaning. It is enough to sense the resolution of polarities in his work, without the free-associative enrichment of myth; enough to see that he has made from his deepest feelings what amount to ritual objects—objects so physical, so full of the grain and texture of life that they suggest metaphysical photographs, taken somehow simultaneously at the dazzling speed of light and at the slow, grinding pace of eternity. Like Seurat's luminous drawings, they are at once aloof and available, frozen and warm. As the poet Paul Valéry remarked, there is nothing more abstract than the real.

I can add little to Stout's own words or to his images reproduced in this catalogue. What I hope I can do—first by brief personal reminiscence and then by a few more quotations from Stout himself—is to suggest why the work of an artist of his significance and seriousness has been so comparatively neglected. It is twenty-three years since his last one-man show (at the Hansa Gallery), three since a mini-retrospective at Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum (where he exhibited along with Salvatore Scarpitta and Paul Sarkisian). But as I said at the beginning, this is not an accident; and as I've hinted since, it is a result of comparatively small production, chosen remoteness from the market place and from publicity and, perhaps most of all, the high seriousness of the work itself—the demands it has made, first to find it and then to study it in a world more accustomed to glancing at billboards and yard goods.

I met Myron Stout in the mid-sixties, in Provincetown, through our mutual friend, the artist Fritz Bultman. Stout was then "underground" for me too—his style, both as man and artist, so different from that of the powerfully established Abstract Expressionists. Often, though surely not always, they were aggressive, blatant, self-centered; and their work was large, sometimes overbearing. Stout was, and is, gentle, subtle, objectively philosophical. His work is small (some of his drawings less than two inches square, none of his paintings larger than forty inches in either dimension), his image intensely concentrated and distilled. Physically, too, Stout is small—about 5′7″, 135 pounds. He speaks softly, with just a trace of genteel Texas drawl.

Stout's environment echoes the man. Since 1952 he has lived most of the year in Provincetown, since 1955 in a modest four-room apartment at 4 Brewster Street, just off Bradford, the town's "Back Street." There he has a living room and studio, each about 16′ by 22′; a smaller bedroom; a neat, modern kitchen and bath. In the living room there is none of his own work, but rather that of younger Provincetown artists (Dodie and the late Jan Muller, Marcia Marcus, Pat de Groot, Susan Baker), plus a detailed map of central Greece, a subtle geometric silk obi from Japan, a heavy striped wool rug from Crete covering a threadbare couch, a Turkish rug on the floor, various fragments of stone, bronze, and pottery from ancient cultures, a collection of ironstone china, and the beginning of a library which flows through the rest of the apartment and includes everything from the classics and historical, anthropological, and archaeological tomes to the most recent art publications, detective stories, and the approximately sixty western novels of Louis Lamour.

Except for the continuation of books, magazines, and catalogues, the studio is comparatively naked, and there too Stout himself is most exposed in his work—some of it still unfinished after many years—pinned to the walls, stacked among books, or propped on his easel. I say "unfinished" and hardly know, in Stout's case, what that means. I am reminded again of Valéry, who said that no work of art is ever really completed, but simply abandoned. Can Stout accept this? Or must he strive, almost romantically, for an unattainable perfection? Will critics someday argue over the state of these works as they do over that of late Cézannes?

The door to Stout's studio is usually closed when he has friends over. It is a private place. The images there resolve the apparent contradictions between furnishings in the living room, books throughout the apartment. One has the sense of a man who does not choose between different cultures or periods of time, but accepts many and brings them together in himself, his work, his surroundings. And one realizes suddenly that everything in Stout's work is about the resolution of seeming contradictions, the polarities which I have mentioned before—not only black and white but night and day, darkness and light, fullness and void, male and female, the symbolic and the concrete. The black-and-white images of the past thirty years or so—some geometric, some biomorphic—are misleadingly simple but actually as profound as variations on the yin-yang, and the edges misleadingly "hard" until one looks a long time and feels their subtlety pulsing with life. In Stout's paintings and drawings, there is always the touch of the human hand and never the intrusion of ruler or graph paper, compass or tape, stencil or template. What at first appears

to be blunt, unaesthetic, lacking "touch"—again recalling a Newman or a Martin—is, on closer examination, filled with Stout's own tender precision, thoughtful concreteness, passion for exactitude.

Over the years—and it takes years—I have gotten to know Stout and his work. He has told me about his childhood in Denton, Texas, where he was born Myron Stedman Stout, Jr., and I have kidded about the power his name might have had if he called himself Stedman Stout—the way Paul Jackson Pollock called himself Jackson—though knowing of course that Stout made the more accurate choice for himself. Yes, for him, "Myron," with its Greek connotations of "delight," rather than power, is just right.

I have heard about Stout's early interest in music, something he doesn't emphasize as much as his equally early interest in mythology (for example, the various versions of *Delphi* and *Tereisias*), but, in my opinion, music underlies his work itself, as well as such titles as *Trio* and *Quartet*. And at parties I have watched him dance youthfully, with perfect rhythm and poise, to the most raucous rock 'n' roll—again bridging the generations.

I have been puzzled by Stout's admiration for his friend and teacher Hans Hofmann, whose style is so diametrically opposed to his own. While understanding from Stout (and so many other Hofmann students) that he was an exemplary teacher, with great warmth, vitality, respect for his students, and the ability to get them to open up, one sentence seems to best sum up what he gave Stout: "He had a fantastic kind of energy, and what he made you aware of was the way a painting *is* energy."

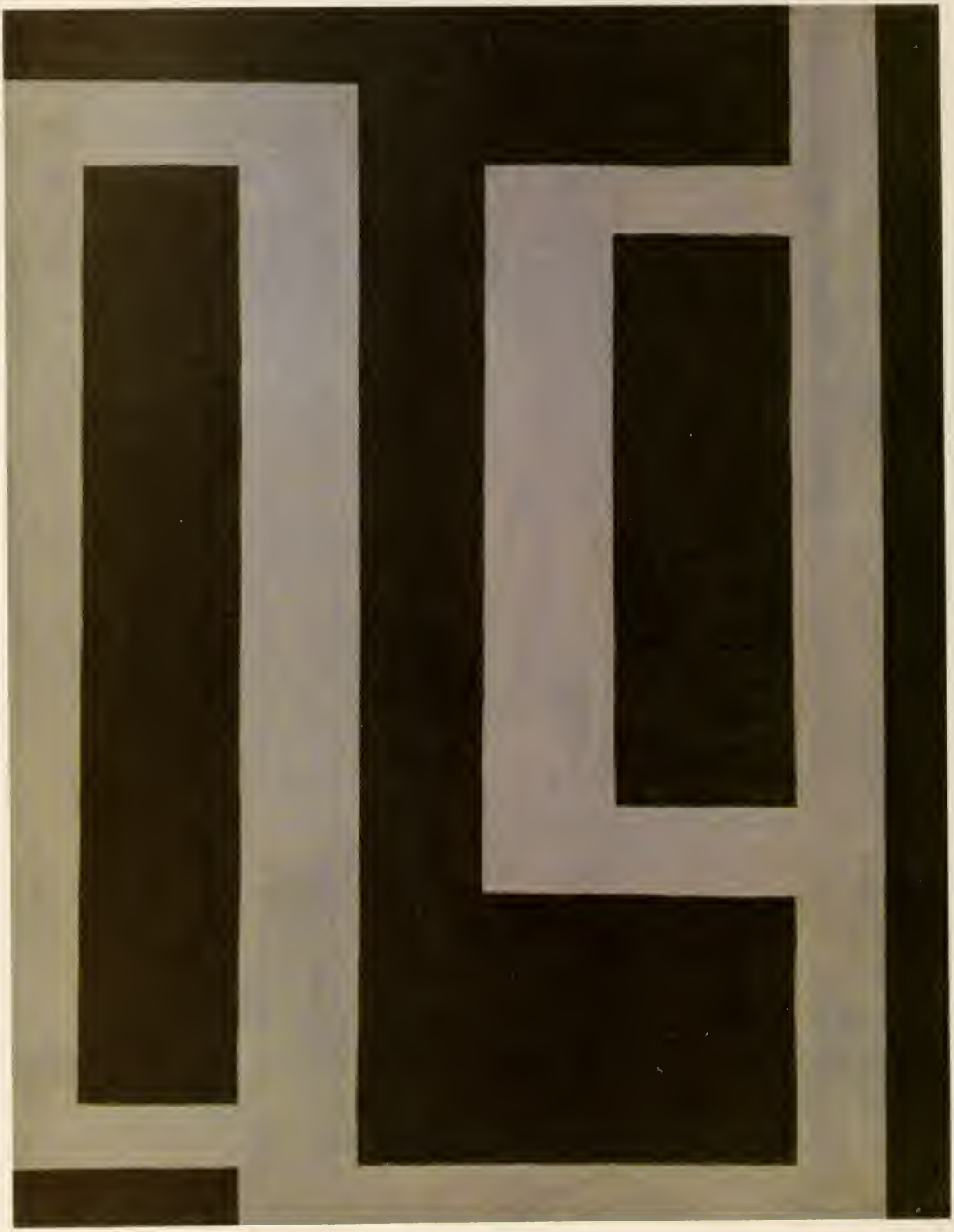
1. *Quartet*, 1948

I have been much more puzzled by Stout's admiration for Louis Lamour's western novels. He lends me these popular paperbacks as if they are a bibliophile's rarest treasures, warning me to be sure to return them. The stories are well-constructed in vivid, movie-like scenes, and have a strong sense of the elemental landscape from which Stout comes. I am willing to concede this much and even that they are "the best westerns"—I really don't know—but when Stout says they're "mythopoeic," I balk: "Stark and simplistic, you mean. All bad guys and good guys. All black and white. That's why you like them, but I miss *your* tender edge, *your* grays."

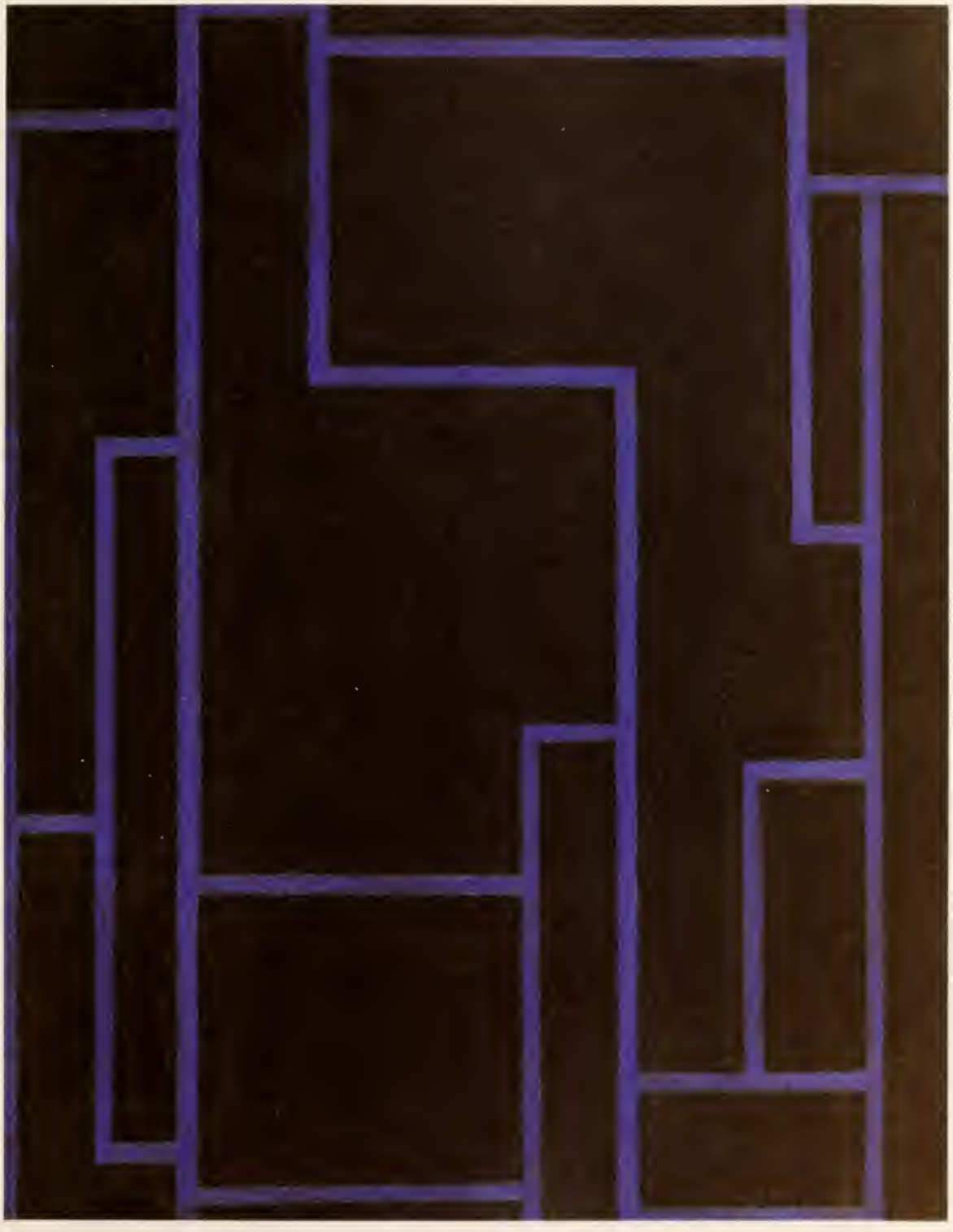
Stout has told me about a snail named Jocko (short for jockey) he used to keep in his apartment—the perfect symbolic pet for him—and I have wondered what he means when he says, laughing as if telling a joke on himself, "It escaped!"

But these are details. I return to Stout speaking more seriously: "I went to see a beautiful Mondrian show at the Sidney Janis Gallery. It must have been '52 or '53, somewhere back in there, and a painter I knew came in and looked around and said, 'Has Sidney changed the lighting in here?' And I looked up and said, 'No, I don't think so, that's the paintings.' He looked at me as if I were crazy and turned around and walked off. I'm convinced that's what this painter saw. He just all of a sudden became aware of how those paintings emanated light. Emanated their own light. They lit up the whole gallery."

From early abstractions on, this is the continuity of Stout's work, what it is really about—light and energy, light *as* energy. And these are not details.



4. *Untitled*, 1950



5. *Untitled*, 1950

6. *Untitled*, 1950

7. Untitled, 1950

3. *Untitled*, 1950

8. *Untitled*, 1951

9. *Untitled*, 1950–51

14. *Untitled*, 1952–53

11. *Untitled*, 1953

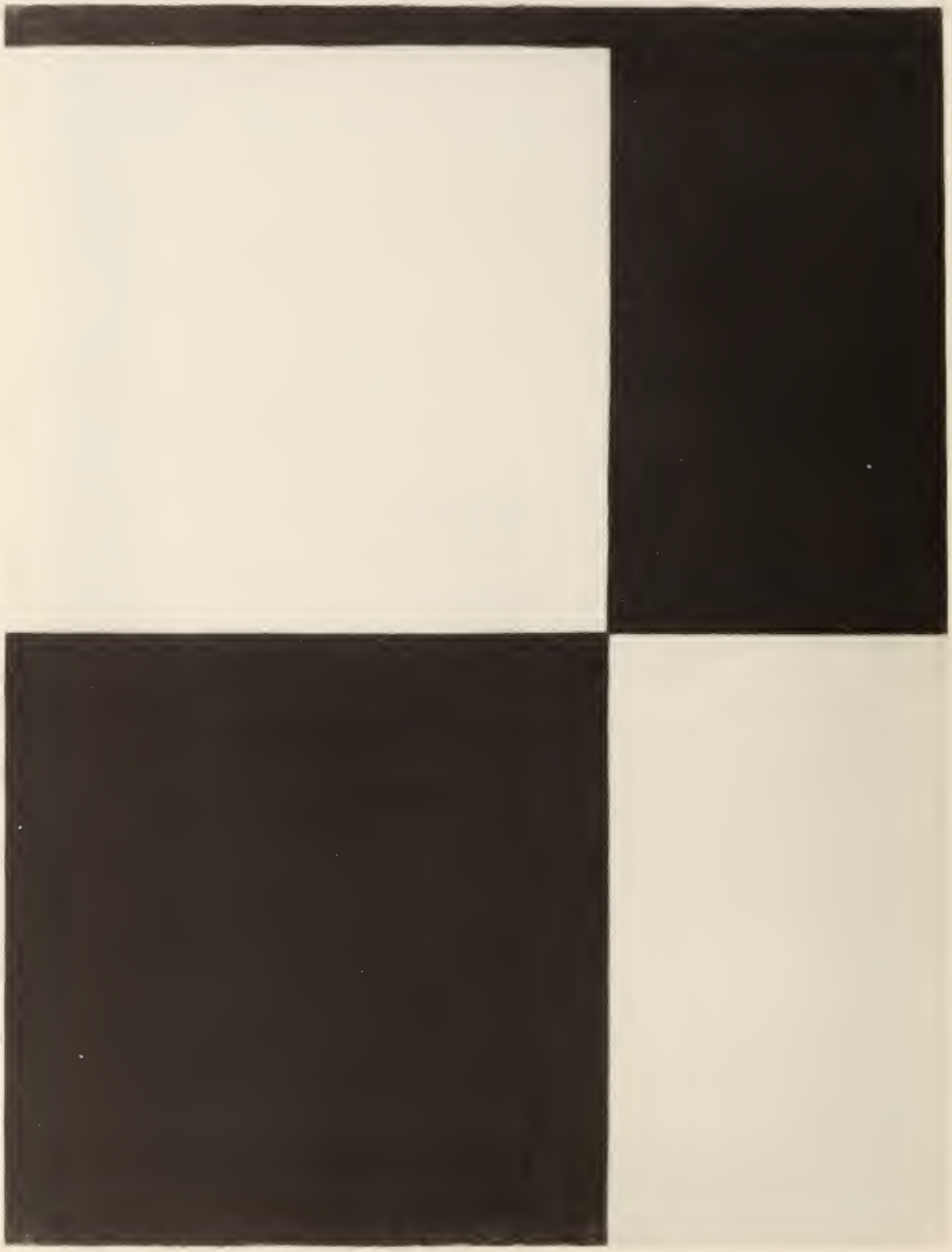
13. *Untitled*, 1953

15. *Untitled* (Number 3, 1954)

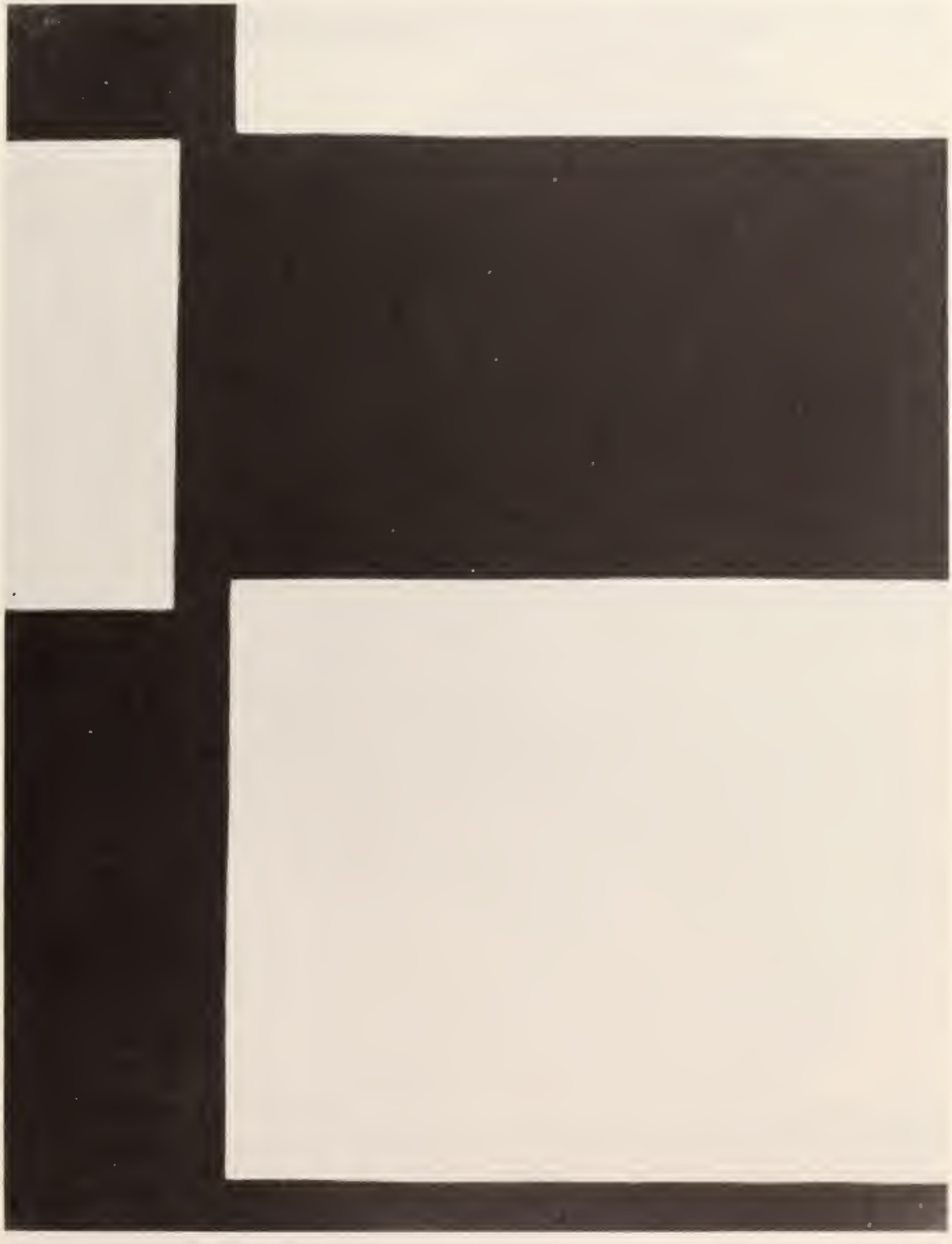
16. *Untitled* (Number 1, 1956)

17. *Untitled* (Number 2, 1956)

18. *Untitled* (Number 3, 1956)

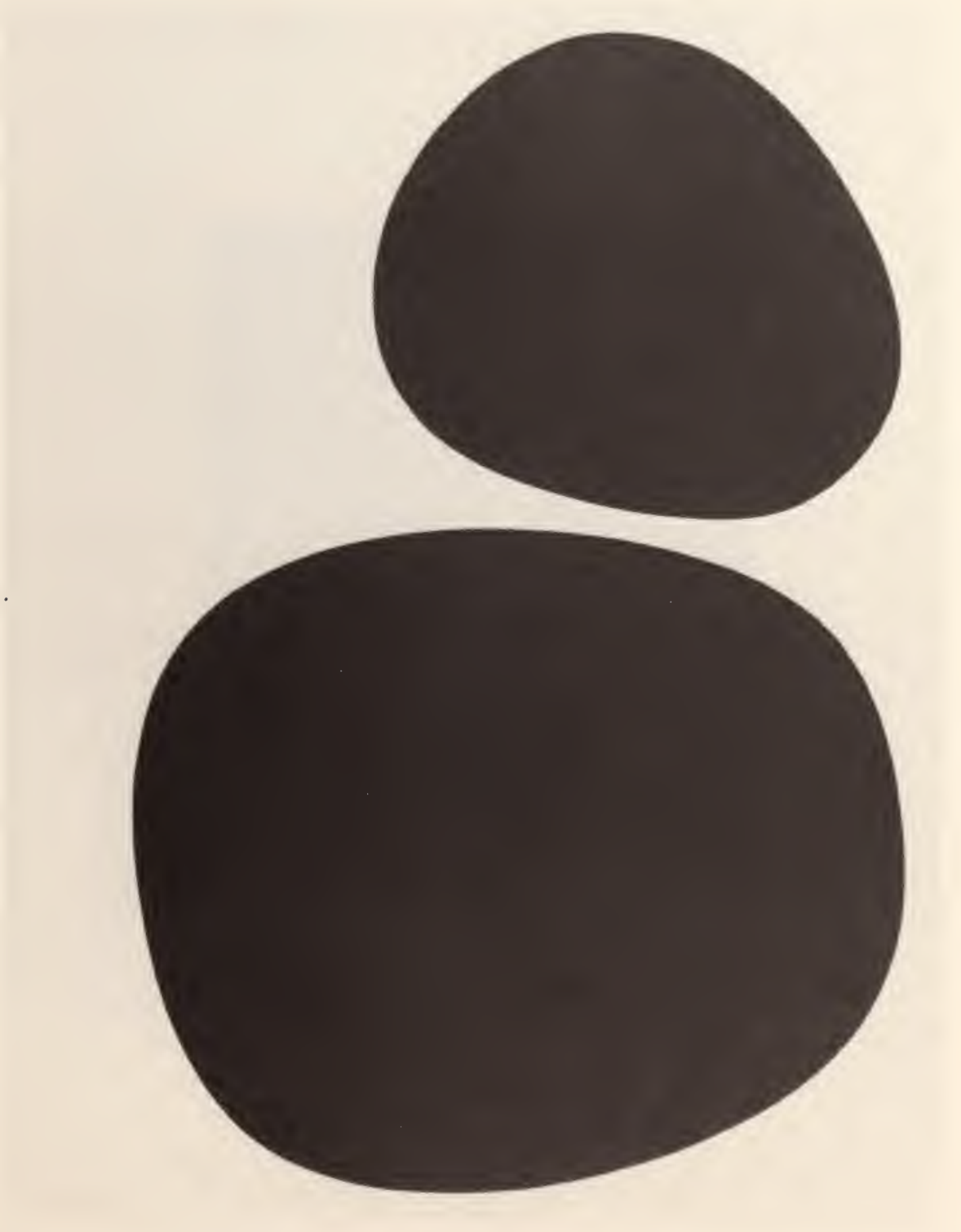


21. *Untitled*, 1953–61



22. Untitled, 1953–61

23. *Untitled*, 1950–62



24. *Untitled*, 1957–62

25. *Untitled*, 1963

26. *Untitled*, 1964

28. *Tereisias I*, 1964

30. *Tereisias II*, 1965

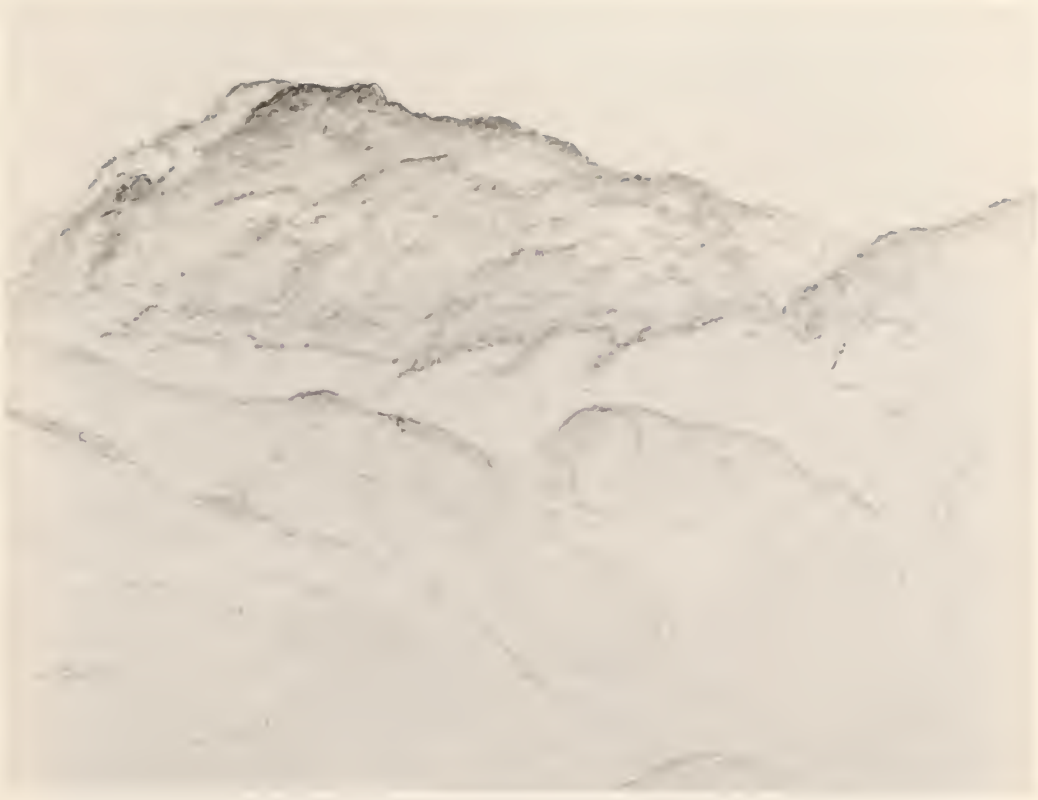
29. *Untitled*, 1964

31. *Untitled*, 1955–68

32. *Leto I*, 1955–68

33. *Demeter*, 1955–68

34. *Untitled*, 1965–69



35. *From the Tuzas*, 1970
36. *Sphacteria, Pylos*, 1970

37. *Moon Lady*, 1964–71

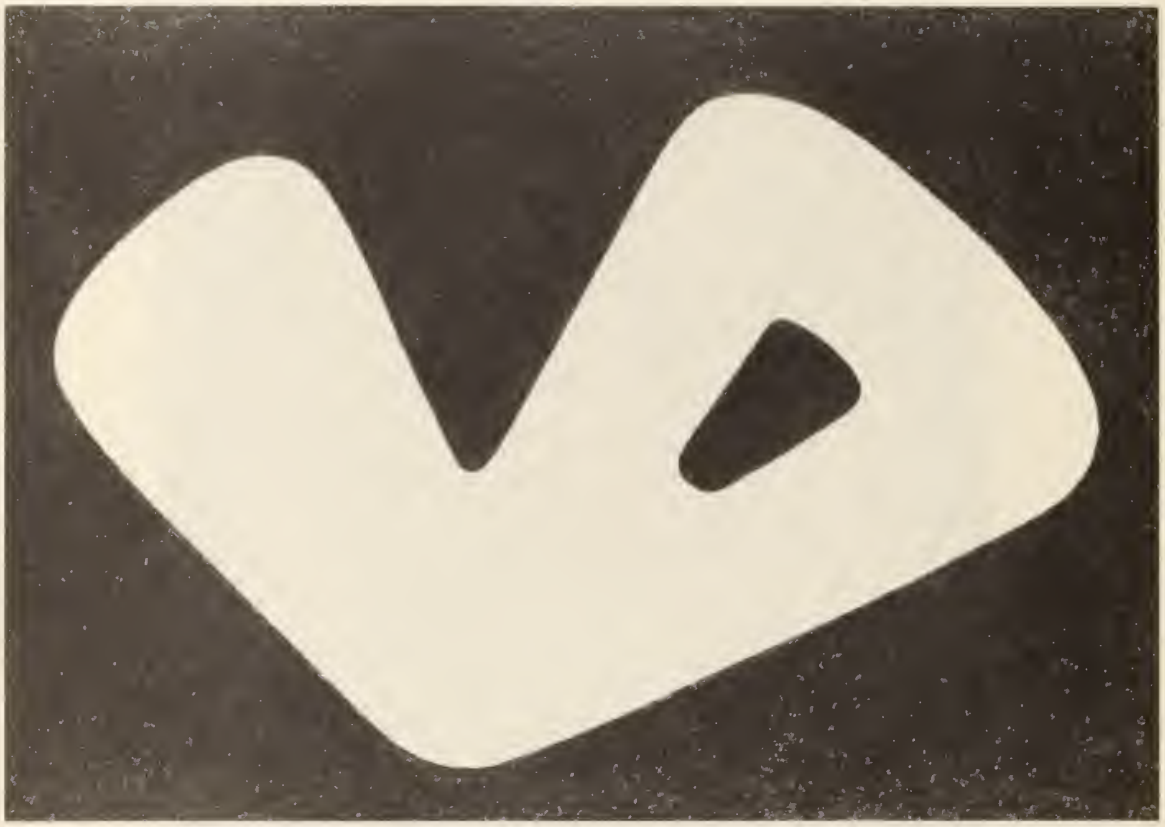
40. *Delphi I*, 1969–72

38. *Adam*, 1965–72

39. *Eve*, 1965–72

41. *Tereisias III*, 1972

42. *Delphi II*, 1970–73



44. *Untitled*, 1966–79

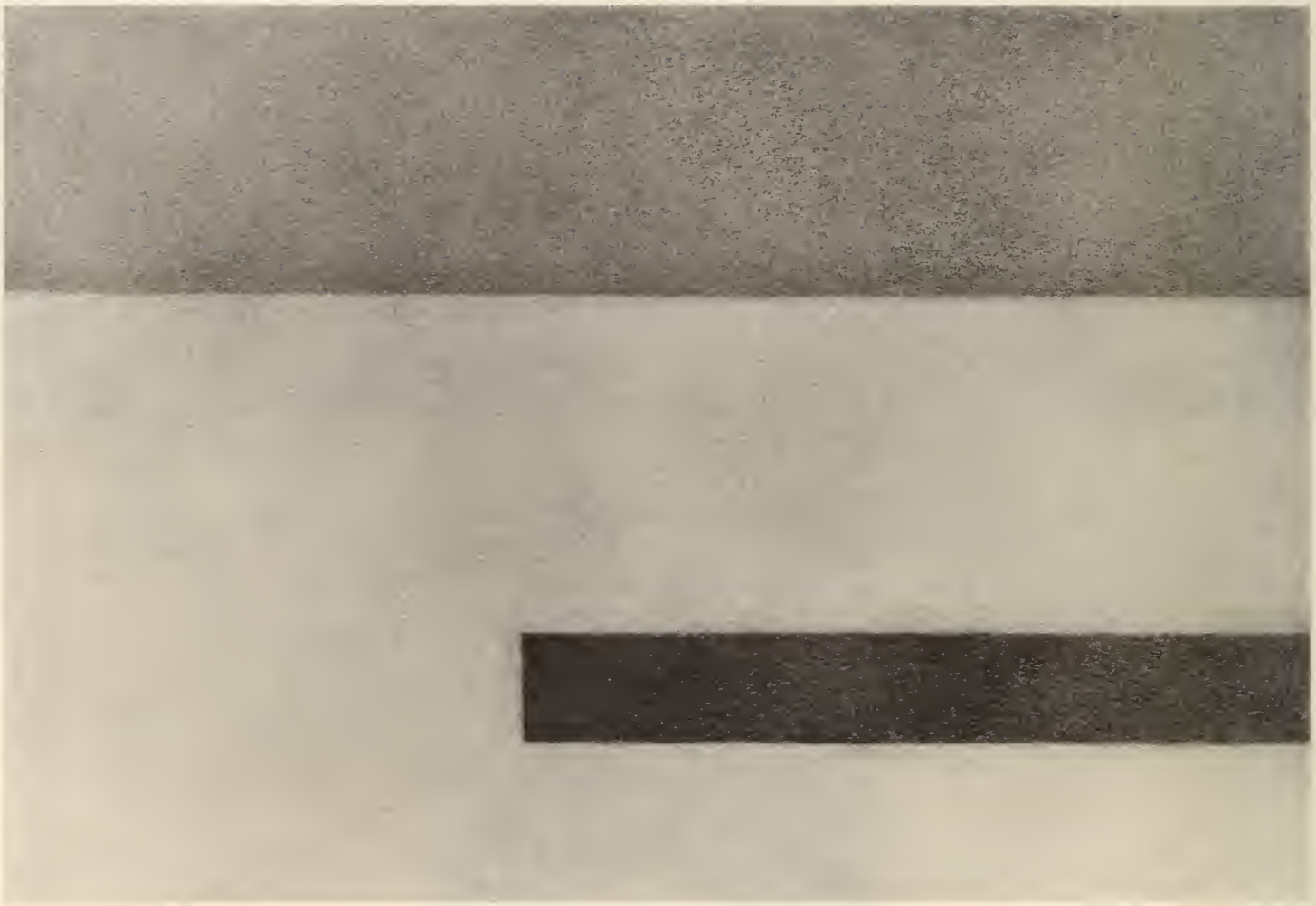
45. *Untitled*, 1967–79

46. *Untitled*, 1972–79

47. *Untitled*, 1973–79

48. *Untitled*, 1974–79

50. *Memento*, 1977–79



51. *Untitled*, 1977–79

52. *Untitled*, 1977–79

Chronology

1908–45:

The scene of Myron Stout's childhood and youth is set in Texas, but, at least in part, it is a Texas Booth Tarkington might have conceived. Born and raised in the relatively small city of Denton (which sits at the northern point of an isosceles triangle whose base points, forty miles to the south, are Fort Worth and Dallas), Stout is a product of a true turn-of-the-century, upper middle class American family. His version comes with a comfortable, spacious period house that, painted pink and surrounded by an immense white porch, looks like a wedding cake; a prudent father who is president of the most reliable bank in town and a Mason; and an industrious, independent mother who, when her husband dies (Myron is two years old at the time), becomes a lady farmer and, when recession hits north Texas in the early twenties, calmly transforms her farming hobby into a retail dairy business.

Stout's parents prided themselves on their learning and their intellectual independence. Before the Civil War intervened, transforming him into an enterprising businessman, Myron's father—Myron Stedman Stout, Sr.—had intended to go into the ministry. He never gave up his Greek and Latin, though, and Myron's mother, who possessed the regal name Emma Alberta Inge Stout, assiduously taught herself German. Together, they kept themselves abreast of Ibsen, Shaw, Pirandello—the advanced, liberal voices of their time. They also kept themselves in the thick of the social life of Denton, and there were even more functions and affairs, gone to and given, when Myron Sr. died. As Myron remembers it, there were always parties in the house, and in the summers the parties spilled out into the garden, where Japanese lanterns hung on the trees.

Myron, his mother and his two elder sisters formed a close family. But, significantly younger than his sisters, he spent a good part of his time alone, much of it on the back of a pony. When he wasn't delivering goods for his mother's dairy (whose center of operations was in the basement of the family house, and whose farm was five miles away), he was off on his own, and he never had to ride or walk far before the Booth Tarkington world of Denton and its round of palm-bedecked parties and civic doings would slip out from under him, and he'd be isolated in north Texas' unpopulated, gently rolling terrain. In the years that follow his adolescence, he moves through his experiences without exactly putting his own stamp on them. He decides to be a painter in his senior year in North Texas State University; but in the years after college, which stretch out to be all the years of his twenties and thirties, he is content to edge up to the idea of a career as an artist. He teaches for a while in the public schools of San Antonio, then gets a little closer to the fire when he spends the summer of 1933

studying with the abstractionist Carlos Merida, at the Academia San Carlos, in Mexico City.

Four years later, having spent most of the intervening time in Denton, he heads off for Teachers College, Columbia University, where he works under Charles J. Martin for a Master's degree. He gets the degree, and remembers Martin as having a good eye and being responsive; and yet not, ultimately, "penetrating" enough. A short time thereafter, Stout is teaching art in a private school in Honolulu. He makes a good number of landscapes in Hawaii, whose terrain and color he still talks about in the most affectionate, caressing way. Yet most of his energy is thrown into teaching, and when he is drafted in June, 1943, he feels that, with the results of his work as a painter still unsatisfactory in his eyes, he will not return to art when the war is over.

1946:

When Stout, urged to go by a friend, appeared at Hans Hofmann's studio-school in 1946, he was armed with his inconclusive experience of twenty-odd years of work; a long-standing admiration for, among other things, Seurat's drawings and for the European purist masters, the Cubists and Mondrian pre-eminently; and an inner resource that he might not have been aware of, but which Hofmann would activate overnight: a one-time serious piano student's belief that, at the base of things, there are immutable laws of harmony and melody, consonance and dissonance. Hofmann was a catalyst for many people, from the late thirties on, but he had a special, immediate potency for Stout because his formulations and analogies —about how colors and shapes must be made to wrestle with, and eventually find peace with, each other—have a musical logic to them.

1947–51:

Things moved fast for Stout now. He gave up his teaching job in Honolulu after the spring 1949 term, and began to divide his time, as Hofmann did, between New York and Provincetown. In both places, he went to the studio-school (the one in Manhattan was on 8th Street) to draw from the model in the afternoons. He became a good friend of Hofmann's, but saw relatively little of Hofmann as a teacher. Even when Stout did, he had the same problem other Americans had in not being able, at first, to penetrate the painter's dense German accent. Neither mattered. Stout didn't need to be given techniques or a direction—he needed to be unlocked. And Hofmann's presence, the simultaneously sensuous and analytical ideas about art that emanated from his person, did it.

Fig. 3. Myron Stout, Provincetown, 1950. Photograph by Bill Witt.

Fig. 4. Hans Hofmann teaching at his school in Provincetown, about 1948–1949. Photograph by Bill Witt.

By 1947, Stout had settled on the small, easel-size painting format he would always be comfortable with. He began, too, to make finished charcoal drawings on the same 25 by 19-inch size sheets he is using today. Three years later, his first crop of mature paintings was in—handsome, well-tailored abstractions, made with a palpable confidence and pleasure. Some take the form of checkerboard and woven, rug-like patterns; others are made up of rectangular color patches which, set side by side and tilting in toward the top, create the effect of an endless stream of blinking, alternately bright and subdued, upward-moving particles. Each, painted in a different way from its neighbor, and in colors that one believes have specific meanings for him, seems to embody a separate mood or experience.

1952–53:

In the fall of 1952, roughly at the moment when he began living in Provincetown year-round, he gave his art a deepened content. Reading, for the first time since college, the classic Greek plays and myths—reading in particular Aeschylus and Sophocles aloud, to himself—he was prompted to make two black-and-white paintings of rounded, rock-like shapes in empty, bare fields. He had made a few pictures of isolated shapes before; but these "Greek" pictures were done with a fast, unthinking purposefulness that was new to him. Meant as homages to the plays, to what he felt was the "tragic poignance" of *Agamemnon* especially, they caught the quality the tragedies have of making us feel that the most essential desires and conflicts can be contained in two or three characters, who invariably keep a wary distance from each other. They caught, too, the baked, emptied look of the Greek landscape. (Did he know how much he was also getting the baked, emptied look of his native north Texas?) The pictures weren't artistic successes (he has never exhibited them); yet, overtly symbolic and theatrical, they stretched him. They were his first real attempt to paint his instinctive sense of the way things are—isolated, yet held, as if by magnetic force, to one another.

At the time, he didn't know how to carry the rounded shapes, or his mood, any further. A year later, though, he produced a series of landscapes and nature studies, perhaps the most successful and personal work he had yet done. Delicate conté pencil drawings, full of a Renoiresque urge to find and fall in with the rounded, overlapping rhythms of whatever he saw before him, they are both classically measured and surprisingly realistic.

1954–64:

In the summer of 1954, he started making paintings, again in black and white, of rounded shapes set, shadowlessly, like heraldic emblems, against plain backgrounds—and realized he was on the firmest ground: he had found his flavor, his "look." In the years 1954–57, thirteen black-and-white images (two of which are of black shapes in white fields) were put down on canvas, and five were completed. The remaining eight would stay in the studio, in varying states of near completion. No new paintings were commenced after this time.

Stout begins to be publicly visible in these years. His first significant show of new work, composed largely of charcoal drawings and the multi-colored abstract paintings of the 1950 period, is held in April 1954, at the Stable Gallery, New York. His second (and last) such exhibition occurs at the Hansa Gallery, New York, in the late winter of 1957, where the new black-and-whites are the center of attention. Respectfully reviewed in the art magazines, neither exhibition sells especially well, but, within a few years, The Museum of Modern Art and the Carnegie Institute, Museum of Art each buy one of the black-and-whites. In 1963, he is included in a quartet of painters (the others being Pollock, Mondrian, and Barnett Newman) that Allan Kaprow examines in a long, impassioned *Art News* article entitled "Impurity," the point of which is to show how wrong-headed it is to label artists either "Purists" or "Expressionists." The same year, two of the black-and-whites are included in The Jewish Museum's prestigious and well-chosen "Black and White" exhibition, for which the collector Ben Heller contributes the catalogue essay. A year later, Lawrence Alloway includes four charcoals in a Guggenheim Museum "American Drawings" show. The show is reviewed by, among others, the much-read (by fellow-artists), much-debated, choosy Donald Judd who, writing in *Arts*, notes that de Kooning, Lichtenstein, Stout, and Johns alone make drawings that are "as developed as their paintings, just smaller."

Out of such events and notices large reputations are not made. But they keep Stout afloat as a name—increasingly known as a distinguished little-known—in the New York art world.

1963:

Among many other enthusiasms, Stout has long been what he calls an "architecture buff," by which he more properly means a full-fledged amateur. In the late forties, he drew up plans for a small house he then had built for himself on the site of the recently torn down Stout family house in Denton. In the mid-fifties, after he became settled in Provincetown,

Fig. 5. Sketch for house, late 40s.

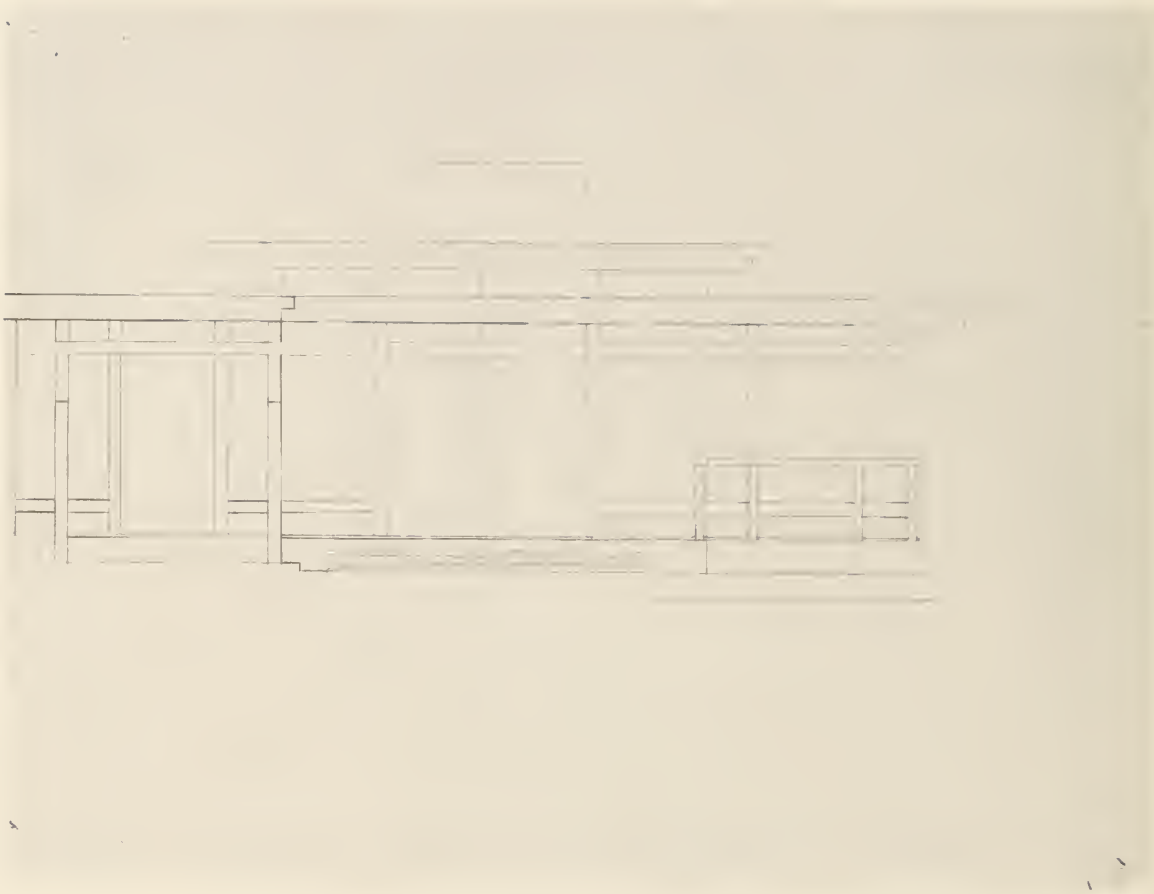


Fig. 6. Sketch for house, mid-50s.

he made finished floor plans, elevations, even diagrams showing the flow of traffic from room to room, for a house with a studio. He envisioned building it for himself, should the needed money materialize, on a hilly spot of land he had eyed and coveted, between Bradford and Commercial Streets. The money didn't materialize. Then in 1963, working with his nephew Ernest Simpson, he devised a plan whereby the two small houses on the Stout family grounds in Denton would be moved to another part of the city, and a good-sized apartment building would be erected in their place. He drew all the plans for the forty-unit structure, to be called Alton House, and, along with his nephew, oversaw its construction.

1964:

In Texas, partially to give himself something to do during a period when he was sick and couldn't get to the Alton House site, he made a number of small-size pencil drawings—and, though unaware of it at the time, hit upon a way of refreshing his art. He had earlier made pencil drawings, mostly in the form of sketches for paintings. But the rapidly made Texas works suggested that graphite pencil drawings on paper could have a life of their own for him. Back in Provincetown, he turned to the idea with a new concentration, enjoyment and, perhaps, dawning ambitiousness.

Sitting on the sofa in his living room, pencil in hand, the paper (of any quality, including telephone notepad paper) placed on a board set on his lap, he was regularly visited by ideas for images, many of which needed only the smallest of formats in order to be realized. In these years, and even more in the seventies, he audaciously allowed himself to go smaller and smaller in size, winding up with some works which are not much bigger than postage stamps, and yet which feel neither precious (in the bad sense) nor like the work of an essentially private, intimate temperament.

1968:

By this year, three more of the black and white paintings were completed (an untitled work, *Leto I*, and *Demeter*), and then shown, the following year, by James Harithas, the Corcoran's director, in the gallery's 31st Biennial Exhibition.

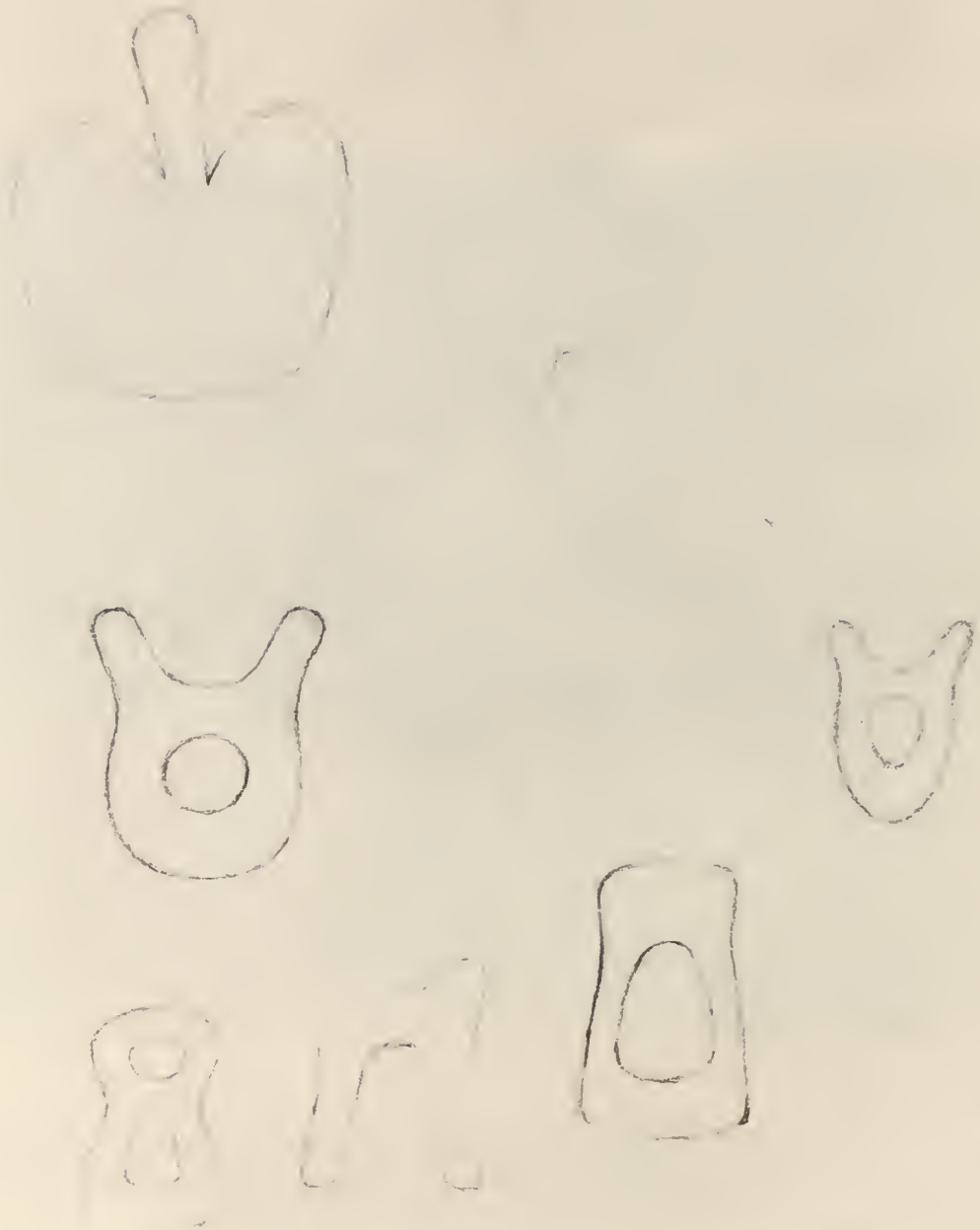


Fig. 7. Sheet of sketches, mid-50s.

1969–72:

Awarded a Guggenheim in 1969, Stout went to mainland Greece and Crete—for almost twenty years the foremost sites of his imagination—in the spring of 1970. And then again later that year. And then a third time in 1972, on a trip that included a stop in Istanbul. In terms of productivity, the trips were only indirectly successful. From each of two different hotel bedrooms, one in Pylos, the other in Delphi, he stepped out onto the balconies and made small-size, subtly powerful landscape pencil drawings. Then, from a bench in the Public Gardens in Athens, he made careful, detailed notes on the flowers planted in tiers before him. From this image of simultaneous profusion and orderliness, he saw himself doing what he had longed (and still longs) to do: embarking on a new series of color paintings.

The Public Garden paintings were never begun. But specific impressions from the Greek trips, plus the harder-to-measure excitement of so much travel in so many loaded locales, refueled him. In and around these years, he produced, or brought to completion, a number of the strongest works he had made in any medium: the pendant *Adam* and *Eve*, *Tereisias III*, *Delphi I* and *Delphi II*—all graphite drawings. Constructed out of superimposed grey, white and black planes—which suggest a deep black night, a clear, pure white light and a ghostly, velvety textured combination of both of them—these are the most majestic, loomingly primordial and, possibly, original, of his images.

1973–79:

He continued working on the five remaining black-and-white paintings and on various charcoals, and was the subject of a small, informal retrospective, organized by James Harithas, for the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, in the spring of 1977. More importantly, over twenty graphite drawings were brought to completion in these years. Stout is not a poet of place, but, rather, of the underlying rhythms in things. Yet the remarkably varied shades of grey in these abstract drawings suggest very real kinds of light and weather: a heavy, hazily bright summer light, a mizzling, chilled winter light. As with his previous graphites, these most recent ones have the finish and density of paintings, and the air of being so many complete, fully ripened expressions of his ideas.

A Note on the Journals

Switching back and forth from yellow legal-size paper to regular typewriter paper, writing in longhand for long stretches, then typing, Myron Stout began keeping a journal in 1950, and kept it up, with occasional jumps and pauses, through 1966. His great preoccupation, especially in the first two-thirds of the fifties, is art, specifically painting; the underlying current is his need to make clear to himself why he paints, and what a painting represents. Sometimes using as his stepping-stone books or articles by, among many others, Suzanne Langer, Erwin Panofsky, modern historians of Greek culture, or contemporary art critics, sometimes going after the issues head-on, he returns again and again to ask—What is abstract art? In what way is it different from naturalistic art? What emotional and intellectual demands need any painting or piece of sculpture make on us? What break did Giotto make with earlier art? How new is Impressionist painting, and what did the Impressionists sacrifice in order to make the art they did? How "pure" is Mondrian? Stout is well aware how much his own work shares with various strands of "purist" art, modern and old, and he is continually drawn to cleaning the House of Purism—pinning down the range of feeling possible in it, analyzing why the work of one such artist is thin or deadly, and another's is rich and satisfying. Interspersed with these speculations, there are notes on his teacher Hans Hofmann, with whom Stout remained close long after he stopped going to Hofmann's classes, and on Hofmann's critics; on the Abstract Expressionists and Pop artists, whose various achievements and then-burgeoning reputations he watched with an astute eye; on the art of the Old Masters, which he saw on his trip to Europe in 1949 and remembered, with a special fond clarity, in the winter of 1950. In the sixties especially, he writes more and more about his own work. He wants to say what he had in mind with certain paintings, and why some of his pictures stymie him—and these entries, like the drawings he began to make roughly around this time, are increasingly personal and inward. It isn't necessary to know his work to be drawn into these passages, where, by virtue of his forthrightness, his refusal to see the rhetorical possibilities in anything, he unintentionally turns the conquests and dilemmas of his life as a painter into so many way stations along the path of one pilgrim's progress.

But art-related matters constitute only a part of these journals—their range is almost literally encyclopedic. From entry to entry, the reader encounters Harry Truman, James Joyce, or James Jones; remarks on the relative differences between being "hip" and being a "beat"; reflections on the best way to design a garden, or what happens visually—how light and color arrive—during a sunrise. There are observations on life in Provincetown, where he's lived for almost thirty years; Leonardo-like paragraphs on the movement of birds and

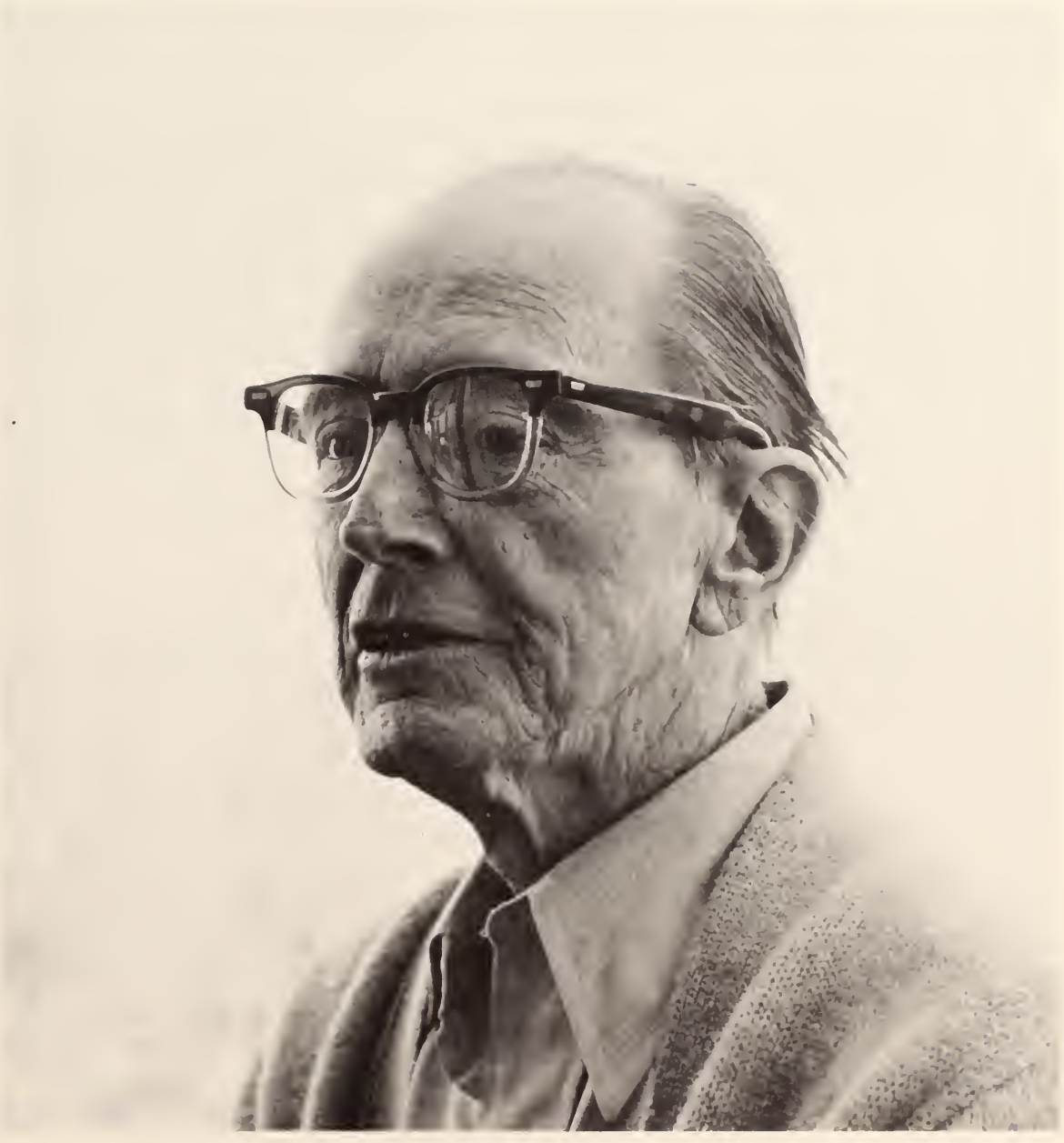


Fig. 8. Myron Stout, Provincetown, 1979. Photograph by Rachel Giese.

the appearance of trees, seen in the near-dark; finely drawn descriptions of how the seasons change in Texas, what it was like to grow up there, and what it means to be a transplanted Southerner.

Most writing by distinctive, strong-willed artists—whether it takes the form of letters, occasional statements or poems, or anything more ambitious—stands in a limbo: the writings must be counted as more than the documents of a man's life, and yet as less than real literature. Myron Stout's journals would properly have to be placed in this roomy limbo, though to say so doesn't give them their special due. Right up until his last year in college, when he suddenly realized he wanted to be a painter, Stout had thought he would be a historian of ancient civilizations. Reading his journals, it's clear that, had his temperament been fractionally different, he could easily have been a historian, or possibly a critic or essayist. There were occasions, especially in the fifties, when he fought to make his ideas coalesce, largely because he was then using the pages of the journals as a space in which to draft letters, proposals, and a statement about his work. But at no time is he ever at a loss with words. He takes for granted that he can say exactly what he wants to say, and this gives his prose a flowing ease. Always articulate, frequently eloquent, his sentences and thoughts come to him as complete, balanced, effortlessly many-claused entities.

Like his pictures, his writing has the veneer of something distanced, formal and exact, beneath which inexact, contradictory feelings pull and tug at each other. Describing Expressionism, he notes that the individual artist's need to find his "own mode of expression" is an understandably crucial thing; but he implies that there may be a loss in this desire, for there is also "a community mode of great adequacy." Stout writes and thinks—and paints—out of this double awareness, the need to push oneself to one's own limit, and the belief that the "community mode," far from being a damper, is a source of strength and energy. He isn't a fussy, stylish or self-conscious writer (or painter); he is a plain—in the sense of down-to-earth—and innately courteous one. He doesn't have to think about the rules of composition, they're inherent in anything he does. At its best—in, say, his 1950 page on Fra Angelico, where he unknowingly characterizes the look and content of the painting that he himself will be making in less than five years' time—his prose has a transparent beauty. We don't catch the specially chosen words or rhythms of one person in it; but, rather, one person's attempt to channel his thoughts through words and phrases of an almost elemental simplicity and directness.

Not all of the writing in his journals is urgent or spirited. Not every entry is lit from

behind with the flame that is there when he talks about Mondrian or gardens, Texas or the Italian Renaissance painters. There are times when what he wants to record is barely more than raw, undiluted information. As a journal-keeper, Stout is a memoirist, a critic, and a connoisseur; he is equally an outline-maker, a note-taker, a scientific observer, a hair-splitter. For pages, he can agree, or argue with, the authors of the historical works he's been reading—volumes on, say, medieval philosophy, Egyptian civilization, or Flemish painting. On more than one occasion he reconstructs, with columns and arrows, birth-dates and death-dates, those same books. Or he can take Joe McCarthy's opening defense speech before a Congressional ethics panel and, equally fascinated and appalled by the Senator's ability to divert the issue to an attack on communism, lay out the component parts of the speech with the deadpan methodicalness of a court clerk assembling evidence in a murder trial.

But even at their most raw, one feels in these entries the pressure of an individual who won't be satisfied until he can make real for himself—until he can pin down the essence of—what he's read, or listened to, or thought about while taking a walk. If there is a key to his need to have things made as specific and concrete as possible, it may be found in a lovely, half-humorous passage in the journals where he talks about how, as a boy growing up in north Texas in the teens and early twenties, he read Wordsworth and wanted to fall under the poet's spell—and found some difficulty in doing so. The problem was that, on the roads and in the fields around the Stout family home and farm in Denton, Wordsworth's host of golden daffodils, the stuff of literature, was not to be found. The setting of Stout's childhood and youth was a proper Victorian house, complete with a beautifully proportioned music room and a well-stocked library; its guiding spirit was his intellectually lively, serious-minded, socially active mother. Outside that embellished, graciously appointed interior world was the un-Victorian Texas landscape—a largely horizontal, often barren and stripped terrain that, though physically majestic and storied in its own way, had virtually no connection with Wordsworth's daffodils—and the realm of culture, beauty, and emotional truth they represented. Stout says that "I must secretly have been convinced that literature had really very little connection with life at all"; but he came to believe something other than this. Turned into neither a skeptic nor a true believer, he grew certain that culture and learning was crucial, but that they could never be taken for granted. They had to be absorbed, believed in as facts as much as a record of imaginative truth.

That determination to not let a speck of the world go by without knowing exactly what it is—without being able to possess it—permeates everything Stout does. It is embodied in

the piles of periodicals, textbooks, newsmagazines, atlases, dictionaries, detective stories, westerns, memoirs, art books and classics that are continually shifted about in his Provincetown apartment, and in the pieces of ancient glass, the Japanese obis, the kilim rugs, the shells and stones he's collected or been given and loves to show people. It is there in his paintings and drawings, where he wants to be precise about the placement of his forms, and the curves that give them life, with such ardor that we can almost see the extra, unneeded energy he brings to the job. It is in these journals, where we hear a man who believes he will know who he is, and what he thinks, only when he can see his thoughts down on paper, there, before him.

The following selections, in their entirety, represent a morsel of Myron Stout's complete journal. They have been chosen to give the reader an overview of the painter's concerns, with the hope thereby of creating a shadowy self-portrait.

Excerpts from the Journals of Myron Stout, 1950 to 1965

December 1, 1950

Barnett Newman . . . has a dryly lyrical quality, and a highly personal way of using basically rough-formed but over-refined shapes. Maybe that's part of his self-consciousness; he feels he must follow his first rough-form ideas, because he recognizes their strength and truth, but his sensitivity (a little over-educated) leads him to an over-refinement of the roughness. Therein is the dryness. The lyrical quality is the instinct that persists through it all. It's because he's not been able to conceive, in another movement, anything so real, and because his need for permanent values is so great, that this one thing he has got hold of has become so important. . . .

December 11, 1950

After seeing Michelangelo and Rubens, Botticelli seems static and still; but in reality there is the "wind," too. There is an imagined wind, or perhaps you are only told about it, rather than actually feeling it. It is gentle and rather proper, in the *Primavera* and the *Birth of Venus*. He felt its urgent force in him, but the robes and flowers and the softly curling tresses were all too precious for him really to unleash the force of a true wind on them. Instead, he lets blow a steady little breeze—he really manufactures it. But sometimes he lets the wind be itself. Then it blows; nervously, a little uncomfortably, a disturbing wind that brings with it a note of despair.

December 11, 1950

Tintoretto is a case within himself. It's almost as though he had been born without the usual earth-based orientation of balance, but had been able to start his life, like one of his saints or mythological personages, suspended or moving on some powerful diagonal axis in the air. He painted "four-square" pictures, but only, I believe, because the Renaissance architectural background was so strong an element in the life of his time. But more and more, as he became older, the architectural setting was abandoned, or so used that its earthbound quality was lost. He was happiest when . . . he could soar not quite above the earth but, as in the *Paradise*, exist in a cosmic atmosphere which belongs to the universe. His various gods and religious figures, even when apparently earth-oriented, stand, sit or recline at a powerful, whirling diagonal angle which allows them to float. . . . Nor is "float" quite the right word, at least, it seems to me to be not quite specific enough in its connotation to express the qualities both of *rising* and of *weight* which his figures possess, nor the living, hovering quality; they hover with . . . the warmth of a continuing breath from some giant being.

December 12, 1950

It's as though he's [Fra Angelico] started out to illustrate, in a long, parchment-sheeted manuscript volume, the story of medieval Christianity; not just an objectively, literally told story, but a highly personal one told with the greatest delight in every meaning. Then the sheets became too small for all the beauty he felt flowing so easily and simply onto the pages, so these story-pictures, with their clear, fresh colors, grew larger and larger. His whole concept kept amplifying and amplifying and his paintings became things of *great* size, even when small in dimensions, for the forms and especially the

colors kept expanding and, as you now look at them, keep on expanding, filling the room, filling your consciousness until you are transported, with him, to some celestial world where only clear and *shining* colors make up the substance of the atmosphere. His figures' tender and truly "beautiful" gestures and expressions help you to realize all this, but it is the pristine and brilliant light of the many colors, and their wonderfully gentle yet vital interplay that create his pictures and take you to a world that never was, yet is present and actual, there before you. It is the fairy magic of childhood which brings something into being out of sheer desire, out of sensations that conjure up their own forms and light their own reality.

January (?), 1954

In western art—say from the 14th century on, painting did take on the psychological effect of a view through a window. It is an intimate effect —it allows us to inhabit our own interior—our *personal* interior that is, and still have those windows, which are paintings. . . . But I still say it's not essential. The Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Persian, most of all, primitive cultures —in fact, no art I can think of except western European art since the 14th century has used this device. They are all none the less art, and art of the very highest quality.

October 9, 1955

Re: Mondrian's "Home–Street–City" Mondrian's "universal" concept is an amazing thing. He is obsessed by oneness, and his ability to conceive in terms of oneness, wholeness and no disparity of parts should be a model to all who have trouble rising above the immediate and particular. And in spite of the rarefaction of the realm which he thus inhabited, he never lost the feeling of his anchor in the process by which he came to his universal concept—the tangible and sensational world was still the raw material of the universality which he would create for himself and everyone else not only in painting terms but in every aspect of life which lends itself to aesthetic expression. Aesthetics was to him a higher morality—an ethics—an absolutely basic and guiding principle through which all aspects of life could come together.

May 12, 1957

Expressionism;—the turning away from the traditional means of expression, and move inwardly for the sake of the personalness of a possible expression—the insistence on discovering one's own mode of expression in spite of the fact that there is a community mode of great adequacy.

June 5, 1957

No garden should be without its vantage point from *above.* Viewed horizontally, i.e., from ground level, the flowers are seen against each other, and, best, against whatever (other flowers, shrubs, walls, etc.) rises above them within the line of vision. Thus a view, from the ground floor level, is particularly good if the garden rises in terraces (and not very high ones). It should be somewhat like the view of an auditorium from the stage, so that the flowers mass upward, just as the seats in the auditorium do.

Such a rising-up into succeeding, higher levels of visibility (which has, emotionally, the quality of a rising envelopment) is also very good viewed from an upper floor. The quality

of it all has to do with the utilization of the emotional satisfaction that comes from the ambiguity of angle. . . . In garden design, no one has ever surpassed the Baroque designers in their knowledge and successful use of these factors. On the whole I think they were more successful than the Late Baroque painters, most of whose work, by comparison, seems static and flat . . . the baroque man (certainly in Italy anyway) was more at home in actual space, in sculpture, in architecture and landscaping than he was on the flat canvas.

June 9, 1957

In the Southwest—in Texas, there is so little in one's surroundings to repeat and give substance to what the culture we inhabit—and study so assiduously—tells us are the real things, the valuable things in the surroundings where that culture grew. In Texas you have to make those things up. Texas is not only provincial—it's a province with little or nothing you can tie into that everything you learn (which always comes from somewhere else) tells you you should be tying into.

When I was first getting acquainted with Romantic poetry I was entranced by it all, but I wondered secretly (because shamefacedly) how I could ever come to the poetical meanings which must surely be those of a line like "When all at once I came upon a crowd— / a host of golden daffodils." In Texas daffodils don't grow out where, wandering high, you can come upon them unexpectedly. Where I lived you couldn't wander high at all short of walking the eight or nine miles (as the buzzards fly) south and westerly to Pilot Knob, the one geographical eminence the whole 900 square miles of the county possesses. I never got there—walking or otherwise, though once when I was in college I did go to a party that was at the . . . bottom of the rise. But as I remember it was the sort of party where one wasn't much interested in finding daffodils.

There one could wander in such a fine, romantic way only in the imagination, and all my reading and studying in English or French or Greek literature produced such *imaginary* images that I believe I must secretly have been convinced that literature had really very little connection with life at all—that Wordsworth must, when you got right down to it, have really "made the whole thing up out of whole cloth."

October 25, 1957

. . . To the Byzantine, so to speak, the world was already a painted world. It *existed* that way for him before he put brush to panel.

November 14, 1957

Pissarro *stays outside* of and *keeps his distance from* his subject. Cézanne penetrates his subject and leads the observer into it so he is not only looking *at* it, but is surrounded by it, or commingles with it.

February 26, 1960

Re: Germaine Brée's *Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time* She remarks about the passive state of the mind in dreams and in intoxication, indicating that the sensations and images produced therein are only transitory—that they are neither acting upon or seized and utilized by the intellect. This is not true, I believe. The elimination of the preoccupation

of the ordinary, daily, and too often harassing events of life releases both the mind and the spirit in dreams and intoxication and allows very profound and deeply subjective life meanings to express themselves through the sensations and images of the dream and the drunken Euphoria. They are not *lost* by their transitory nature—for every conscious or sober sensation is also transitory and is not necessarily lost. They are "out of the habit" of usual cognition and consciousness, and tend therefore to fade more quickly and be lost. But they have a permanent effect of some kind, I am sure, and can (with danger, perhaps) be cultivated to useful effect. They are not *false*—they are *real*, and as much a significant part of the essential being of the dreamer or the drinker as his waking and sober self.

March 21, 1960

The connection between the Greek theory of symmetry and proportion . . . and the modern conceptions of "composition"—as Hofmann, for instance, would put it. They are, basically, the same thing. All the Greek (and post-Greek —or out-of-the-Greek) thinking on the subject leave out of account the element of expression, or expressiveness, which is so important to the modern person, though. The Greek took so for granted that art was a human expression, I suppose, that it was not necessary to mention it. So he concentrated on the quality in art which made it what it was—an elevated and elevating thing—elevated, that is, above—lifted out of—the realm of the habitually known and necessary, and tried to determine what it was that made it "way out." . . .

March 23, 1960

No matter how revolutionary in spirit, the artist must accept limitations—not limitations in the sense of their being so binding that they stifle and kill his work, of course, but he must recognize the limitations that actually exist—in him, in his medium, in the society and culture in which he operates. He is not a free agent in the sense that he can do absolutely what he wants to do. . . . This is not to say that he is absolutely limited. As he is an individual, he has a different set of limitations from anyone else, and thus is not bound by exactly the same things as anybody else. He can do what *he* can do. His task is to find out how he can operate within his set of limitations. Others' limitations are not his concern. His will be related to others', for he lives with other people and there will inevitably be similarities in his and their limitations; but as he sees life and the world differently, he will operate differently, and he must discover what that is. If he discovers what this is, or even something of what this is, what he does will be a revelation to others and will already possess something of that transcendence which art has, for he will have expressed something of how he personally exists in the framework of his cultural milieu, and this in itself is achievement.

March 24, 1960

Always, in painting—with every picture, there is this contrast of the picture as my dream, my vision, and as this object in front of me—which confronts me. This contrast is, also, often, and for long, a conflict: the object will not become the vision, the vision will not translate the object. . . .

April 28, 1960

. . . I suppose Albers came to his purism out of De Stijl *and* Kandinsky, and with the strong touch of 19th century scientifical idealism which brought such a strong pragmatic note to the Bauhaus—together, of course, with the German mystical-metaphysical idealism.

The earlier purists were so much more the poets and the mystics in their work than any now practicing, and these are the very qualities which give their work more validity (together, of course, with a greater artistry) than that of the ones now practicing. I include Albers, of course, with the earlier ones, though I can not feel him the artist that Mondrian was, of course. He certainly does have the transcendental ideal, though, and he not only does not lose it with increasing age, but seems to strengthen and clarify it. His work always gives me pause, because the scientifically "measured" quality always stops me (at least momentarily—and sometimes blocks me) on the way "through" his work to what he has to say or present. On the other hand I always come again and again to a great admiration for the consistent and truly integrally held vision which impels him and is, on the whole, revealed in his work. That he can hold it is very remarkable, for it's almost as though he were a man out of his time—he should have lived a generation earlier when the materialism and lack of faith and conviction of today would not have been there to beat on him and his audience. The solitariness of his powerful idealism would have been easier to bear, so to speak, had he come to full flower in 1900 or 1910 instead of now. I think possibly he has not been able to reconcile his ideals with the world he finds himself in—his work is not embracingly "telling" enough. But he still holds to the basic—to the fundamentals of what he knows will give expression to what he means.

February 10, 1961

Southerners are accounted to have a fierce—or in other ways powerful—*pride*, and it is certainly true that it is perfectly evident to people from elsewhere in the country that personal pride is an outstanding quality with them. At the same time that it often makes them difficult to deal with, it also contributes to the easy charm that is accounted one of the Southern virtues. It contributes also to the strongly personal and individual character that is very "Southern." Every town in the country of course has its *characters*; but southern towns are made up of characters.

There is something in the whole way of life there that makes for this . . . among Southerners who, constantly going to and coming back from other sections of the country—and the world—it is never lost; nor is it ever lost in those who emigrate to the East, West and North. No matter how much of others' viewpoints and ways of living they acquire, no matter how much they adapt themselves to the living experience elsewhere, they remain quietly, ruggedly and sometimes defiantly southern. . . .

February 11, 1961

This business of living in Provincetown, of *choosing* to live in Provincetown, I persistently keep suspecting. . . . Above all, the place is beautiful: it has the clearest, most . . . beautiful light to paint by, but the light charges every form, or every visual perception with a magical quality, so that just *seeing* is always a delight. . . .

March 5, 1961

. . . People of my generation (and apparently people of Mondrian's and Kandinsky's generation also) were formed in a culture which may have had as its clearest ideal a future for mankind which would be illuminated and reformed by science. There was a strong religious quality in this belief; in fact it contained whatever of religion one had. . . . The intelligence of man would become his salvation. One's deepest and most keenly felt belief was that one had fundamentally within, in common with all men, the capacity, through knowledge and the application of intelligence, to direct one's fate, and thus mankind as a whole *could* direct its (collective) fate.

March 10, 1961

. . . There is, I came to realize, in me a need not only to see the painting from every position, but also to work on it from every position. I knew instinctively that the painting did *not* have four *bases*, it had only one—the original impulse for the painting was a man-standing-on-the-earth oriented one (at least this is true of my whole post-1945 abstract period). But it worried me, both as a matter of logic and philosophy, that a painting, in the process of its working, sometimes turned itself over. . . . After weeks, perhaps, of work (never, that I remember, did one "turn over" that was a quick, spontaneous one) I would realize that it took on more form upside down than right side up. I accepted the fact that it had. . . .

I believe it was when I started the ovoid forms . . . that I began to have so much trouble from working sideways. There was such a fundamental difference sideways from upside down. I must have worked and reworked and re-reworked . . . for months trying to understand what was happening, for I somehow expected it to be only a simple and easily calculable difference from the upside down position. I stumbled through the problem somehow (I never *understood* how). . . .

Gradually, since that time (1955–56) I've come to understand more about it. Our eyes, horizontally placed in us, yet register things according to our sense of upright physical balance.

April 21, 1961

. . . the Cubist revolution . . . was a real milestone or marker in the course of painting because it not only made a still more radical break than had previously been made with the concept of the "natural" image, but provided a sort of pictorial *rationale* for the concept that the pictorial image did not need—perhaps in the least—to resemble the visually-apprehended forms of "nature" in order to be humanly expressive. It became evident then that there were areas of visual expression, as yet undeveloped, that could "carry" human feelings—feelings about the living experience as an entity, as a whole—feelings about the way it felt to be living it, and about the eternal connectedness and, at the same time, disconnectedness of things, feelings one had not only when one *looked* at life as it could only be seen, but feelings one had when one *heard*, when one smelled, when one tangibly felt, when one moved, when one *felt* others move. It was recognized that *all* feelings, whether they had their source in visual experience or not, become, in the inner life, an amalgam from which image-symbols

formed, spontaneously, which could be given outward visual expression.

May 18, 1961

Lawrence Cambell . . . puts the bit about the difference between optical ambivalence and "counterpoints" very well. It is something that few people understand. If they get a "flip" back and forth from positive to negative, from negative to positive, they believe they have got the message of plasticity. But, really, *ambivalence* is only the first stage, so to speak, of comprehending what it is all about. Of course there has to be some degree of simultaneous perception of the forms, or the "flip" would not occur for them. But even so it is only the beginning, for the *simultaneity* of the Cubists, of the Neo-Plasticists—in fact of all great painting . . . is nothing unless it is an integral part of an overall "feeling-concept" (an awkward phrase, perhaps, but it will have to do for the moment) —unless it is there to carry the message of something humanly felt, and felt about *human experience*. . . .

April 1, 1964

Re: Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, p. 23 & ff. It's interesting what he has to say about the effect of the *light* in Greece on the artistic conception there, and even on their thought in general, because, especially when I go back to Texas after some time away, I am aware of how different and distinct the light there is; and I often speculate about its effect on my color concepts, and notice the wholly different color preferences that people there have.

The long period each year of heat and drought, when the heat *sears*; and so does the light, for the hot, clear—that is, largely clear, but a little bit slatey—light can sear the eyeballs just as the hot sun and wind sear the skin—and penetrate to the bones. The outside is so uninviting that the tendency is to cut off the ontside from the inside. . . .

In their houses and buildings, and in the interiors also, the preference is usually for duller colors—the ochers, drabber-than-olive green, yellows always on the brown side, and likewise oranges and reds that are modified toward brown rather than gray.

Color is never sensuous. Where the "touches of color" are used in interiors to relieve this general drabness and non-color effect, the colors chosen have a harsh brilliance. . . . They always have a generic relationship to the harsh brilliance of advertising signs. They are usually quite "tasteless," but are the direct relief from the drabness of the more general use of color. . . .

Color has a *dryness*, usually, in the landscape, a drabness. The drabness is not the dead gray drabness of an Eastern cityscape, but a sun-dessicated drabness, and the inhabitants have been conditioned by it and adjusted all the colors they use analogically to it. . . .

April 15, 1964

The trouble I referred to that haunted me for so long began when I quite consciously attempted to simplify the painting process for myself. The constant and agonizing doings and re-doings seemed quite enough to have to put up with, and my inadequacies with technique to cope with on top of that seemed too much. Many people think that with the simplicity of style in my paintings and the stark purity, etc., that they require great technical adequacy and facil-

ity for their execution. In my case, anyway, the reverse is true. I do not have technical facility, and every telling brush stroke is the result of great effort—often willful effort. Similarly, they think of me as having great patience. I do have—or rather I have developed a great measure of it, but it is precisely because I have *no* patience, basically, that I have had to develop it—my first and most persistent tendency is to go on ahead with it, letting the chips fall where they may. . . .

November 26, 1964

. . . thus, seeing a part of the "shape" out of kilter, I know that the edge has not, say, the proper curvilinear quality to reveal the shape—to define the substance that's *in* the shape (and it's *in* it, *not* at the edges!) so my consciousness works with the *curve* at that particular place, trying to see and develop its necessary degree of curvedness, its continuousness, whether it is properly swelling or contracting the shape. . . .

The source of a curve—of "circularity"—is in one's body—*not* in the idea, "circularity," or "curvedness," and in my painted shapes every curve has its source in my body movements—or in my sense of them, my feeling of them. Every curve painted, I believe, is an analogue of some particular movement felt and sensed. . . .

March 25, 1965

Being fascinated by processes, I have to acceed to and fight through all the processes involved in painting or drawing or whatever. In drawing the small pencil studies, for instance, I have a positive and very real—and lasting (it *never* flags) delight in overcoming the grain of the paper for my ends. This leads only too easily to a sort of "fix" on the process—and in times of confusion and weakness of purpose it can take over. But I cannot overcome this by simply saying to myself that I must play down the process—overlook, for instance, areas where the paper is particularly recalcitrant, and go on to the "next" thing. Once I've even become aware of something wrong—a weakness in the drawing where the process is not working wholly to my ends, that has to be changed, no matter how unnoticeable to any one else, no matter what! Not because the drawing couldn't, possibly, be completed satisfactorily without doing it, but because I can't even *see* what else there is to be done until I have done it!

May 21, 1965

Atomic paintings—that's what I do! Every bloody atom has to be painted individually! I may think I'm working in a macrocosmic vein but that's a mistake. It's microcosmic and a plague on it!

July 1, 1965

There is part of my process in painting and drawing that, logically, seems futile; it seems irresolute, diddling. It's not even muddling (that implies a clearer purpose than this has). I do it in a kind of hypnotic state, it comes over me, or takes over. I often think it's when I'm (rather mechanically) clearing away the underbrush—cleaning the drawing, erasing carefully at all edges, and total white areas; touching up black, in paintings, clearing away "ridges" of paint, white (chiefly) and black, in the scraping-the-paint-down process, that this "state" often takes over.

It's a state that's almost somnolent. I'm a little bit removed—often deeply removed, possibly—from the alert time-and-place consciousness of where I am and what I'm doing—of purposefulness. "Something" has taken over.

For *long*, I considered this a weakness—and something to be overcome—but my efforts to overcome it were useless. Then I decided it was the result of a physical state—weariness—or that physical and psychic lethargy that I have from the arthritis, and this certainly tends to induce it, I'm convinced. I could work this way when I felt too second-rate to do most anything else and sit and read, but not always, by any means. So it seems there is one level of awareness, especially, that this "state" satisfies—or expresses.

Finally, I believe I have discovered that it is a very essential state in the whole creative process. As I get my feelings and "ideas" about what I'm doing muddled and unclear, I seem to resort to it—or to wait for such a state. I believe I don't really feel that (to put it interiorly) the painting or drawing *is mine* until I've gotten muddled, then fiddled and diddled over it for long in this state; and then when I can approach the work again with the fresh, alert, comprehensive vision that seems most productive to me it opens up, clears, seems beautiful to me again, and I can go on to a conclusion.

What I *think* I'm doing is restoring the color—getting the black and the white to function properly as the colors that they are (instead of the sort of denotations they keep tending to become) and, of course, this is true. But at the same time I am either absorbing something about what I've already got on the canvas or paper, or I'm reaching into areas of my perceptivity that I don't otherwise reach in order to add to what's there, or *both*. It's apparently part of my process of working "in depth" and "in fullness"—or "completeness"—(the "synoptic").

July 13, 1965

The unformulated, or partially, or *quasi*-principles by which I work. They are there—except I don't really know what they are!

October 13, 1965

(Reading John A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, p. 17 and the whole first chapter.) The discussion of the effect of geographical environment on the Egyptians brings to mind my own cogitations on same with regard to myself.

I think it was only when I came fully alive, so to speak, as a painter—when I had worked with Hans—that the effect on me of the flatness of my native environment had affected my imagination so powerfully. The flatness—or rather the successively endless, low-rolling character of North Texas and of all the areas of Texas that I went to in my young years had the effect of giving promise in every direction. "Things" and likewise "affairs"—whatever I was aware of and that concerned me *extended* out in, possibly, every direction—every direction of thought and of possibility—but they extended predominantly in a single plane—horizontally. Except for various structures such as the county courthouse and the grain elevators and such (never climbed more than to the second storey) my habitat—my *familiarly* known plane of existence—was the ground,

with whatever slight up-and-downness it had, the downstairs and upstairs of home, school and such. "Pilot Knob"—our local "mountain" was a flat-topped hill (not quite a *mesa*) which rose possibly a hundred and fifty, maybe two hundred feet above its plane to S.S.W. of town. I never climbed it, but it was certainly an object of my romancing imagination. . . .

October 20, 1965

I believe that *flatness* (as of the canvas, for instance) is something we never *see*, but only *know*. The eyes are not constructed to see flatness, and we come nearer knowing it through the sense of touch. If this is true, the basis of our apprehension of a painting has a duality of see-touch, or maybe better—touch-see, which sets up what is probably the primary, vivifying *tension* on the basis of which the "living"—the "created" quality of a painting depends.

If this is so, is this why I must pay such endless and infinite attention to the topography of the paint on my canvases?

Selected Bibliography

Alloway, Lawrence. *American Drawings* (exhibition catalogue). The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum: New York, 1964.

Canaday, John. "New Talent, USA." *Art in America*, Spring 1960, pp. 22–59.

The Classic Spirit in 20th-Century Art (exhibition catalogue). Sidney Janis Gallery: New York, February 1964.

Days Lumberyard Studios: Provincetown 1914–1971 (exhibition catalogue). Provincetown Art Association and Museum: Provincetown, Massachusetts, August–October 1978.

Ennis, Michael. "Review." *Texas Monthly*, August 1977, pp. 110, 112.

Friedman, B. H. "Too Little Attention: Art Chronicle." *New Boston Review*, January 1977, p. 17.

Harithas, James. *Thirty-First Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* (exhibition catalogue). Corcoran Gallery of Art: Washington, D.C., 1969.

Kaprow, Allan. "Impurity." *Art News*, January 1963, pp. 30–33, 52–55.

Legg, Alicia. *Art Since 1945: From the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (exhibition catalogue). The Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1975.

Maartens, Katherine. "Myron Stout" (unpublished Master of Arts thesis, based on a series of taped interviews). Hunter College, New York, 1979.

Sandler, Irving. *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*. Harper & Row: New York, 1978.

Schwartz, Sanford. "Myron Stout." *Artforum*, March 1975, pp. 38–43.

Seckler, Dorothy Gees (text) and Kuchta, Ronald A. (editor). *Provincetown Painters: 1890's–1970's* (exhibition catalogue). Everson Museum of Art: Syracuse, New York, 1977.

Smith, H. R. Bradley. *Cape Cod as an Art Colony* (exhibition catalogue). Heritage Plantation of Sandwich: Sandwich, Massachusetts, 1977.

Solomon, Elke M. *American Drawings 1963–1973* (exhibition catalogue). Whitney Museum of American Art: New York, 1973.

Tillim, Sidney. "What Happened to Geometry?" *Arts*, June 1959, pp. 38–44.

Catalogue of the Exhibition

1
Quartet, 1948
Oil on canvas, 20 × 24 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

2
Untitled, 1950
Oil on canvas, 26 × 22 inches
Private collection

3
Untitled, 1950
Oil on canvas, 18 × 24 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

4
Untitled, 1950
Oil on canvasboard, 18 × 14 inches
Grey Art Gallery and Study Center,
New York University Art Collection

5
Untitled, 1950
Oil on canvasboard, 18 × 14 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

6
Untitled, 1950
Oil on canvasboard, 18 × 14 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

7
Untitled, 1950
Oil on canvas, 30 × 20 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

8
Untitled, 1951
Oil on canvas, 26 × 22 inches
Richard Brown Baker Collection

9
Untitled, 1950–51
Charcoal and pastel on paper, 25 × 19 inches
Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine,
Meriden, Connecticut

10
Untitled, 1951–52
Charcoal on paper, 25 × 19 inches
The Brooklyn Museum; Gift of the
Brooklyn Museum Fellowship Committee

11
Untitled, 1953
Black conté pencil on paper, 12 × 16 inches
Lariviere Collection, Montreal

12
Untitled, 1953
Sanguine conté pencil on paper,
11⅞ × 15⅞ inches
Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Carpenter, Jr.

13
Untitled, 1953
Black conté pencil on paper, 9 × 12 inches
Sanford Schwartz

14
Untitled, 1952–53
Charcoal on paper, 25 × 19 inches
Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Carpenter, Jr.

15
Untitled (Number 3, 1954)
Oil on canvas, 20⅛ × 16 inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Philip Johnson Fund, 1959.

16
Untitled (Number 1, 1956)
Oil on canvas, 28 × 24 inches
Lariviere Collection, Montreal

17
Untitled (Number 2, 1956)
Oil on canvas, 20 × 14 inches
Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Carpenter, Jr.

18
Untitled (Number 3, 1956)
Oil on canvas, 26 × 18 inches
Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute. Pittsburgh

19
Untitled, 1956
Charcoal on paper, 25 × 19 inches
Private collection

20
Untitled, 1956–58
Charcoal on paper, 25 × 19 inches
Marjorie Windust and Nathan Halper

21
Untitled, 1953–61
Charcoal on paper, 25 × 19 inches
Sanford Schwartz

22
Untitled, 1953–61
Charcoal and pastel on paper, 25 × 19 inches
Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Carpenter, Jr.

23
Untitled, 1950–62
Charcoal on paper, 25 × 19 inches
Henry Geldzahler

24
Untitled, 1957–62
Charcoal on paper 25 × 19 inches
Mr. and Mrs. B. H. Friedman

25
Untitled, 1963
Graphite on paper 6 × 5⅜ inches
Richard Bellamy

26
Untitled 1964
Graphite on paper, 6⅜ × 4½ inches
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York; Gift, Mr. Walter Gutman

27
Untitled, 1964
Graphite on paper, 2⅞ × 4 inches
Private collection

28
Tereisias I, 1964
Graphite on paper, 9⅜ × 7⅛ inches
Private collection

29
Untitled, 1964
Graphite on paper, 1¾ × 12 inches
Henry and Martha Edelheit

30
Tereisias II, 1965
Graphite on paper, 5⅞ × 5 inches
Private collection

31
Untitled, 1955–68
Oil on canvas, 25 × 19 inches
Richard Brown Baker Collection

32
Leto I, 1955–68
Oil on canvas, 20 × 16 inches
William Hokin

33
Demeter, 1955–68
Oil on canvas, 30 × 26 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

34
Untitled, 1965–69
Graphite on paper, 6½ × 6⅝ inches
Promised Gift of
Mr. and Mrs. B. H. Friedman;
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

35
From the Vuzas, 1970
Graphite on paper, 5 × 6⅝ inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

36
Sphacteria, Pylos, 1970
Graphite on paper, 1¾ × 5¼ inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

37
Moon Lady, 1964–71
Graphite on paper, 4¼ × 4½ inches
Maia Muller

38
Adam, 1965–72
Graphite on paper, 7¾ × 5¼ inches
Washington Art Consortium

39
Eve, 1965–72
Graphite on paper, 7¾ × 5¼ inches
Washington Art Consortium

40
Delphi I, 1969–72
Graphite on paper, 4⅞ × 5⅛ inches
William Alexander

41
Tereisias III, 1972
Graphite on paper, 5⅜ × 4⅛ inches
Parasol Press, Ltd.

42
Delphi II, 1970–73
Graphite on paper, 5½ × 5 inches
Grey Art Gallery and Study Center,
New York University Art Collection

43
Untitled, 1976
Graphite on paper, 1⅞ × 1⅜ inches
Christopher Walling

44
Untitled, 1966–79*
Graphite on paper, 4⅞ × 7 inches
Dr. and Mrs. Aaron H. Esman

45
Untitled, 1967–79*
Graphite on paper, 4⅛ × 3⅝ inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

46
Untitled, 1972–79*
Graphite on paper, 4½ × 4¾ inches
Private collection

47
Untitled, 1973–79*
Graphite on paper, 4⅜ × 6½ inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

48
Untitled, 1974–79*
Graphite on paper, 7½ × 5 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

*The artist wishes to acknowledge the very able help of his studio assistant, Charles R. Anderson, on this work.

49
Untitled, 1976–79*
Graphite on paper, 1¼ × 1¼ inches
Roberta Smith

50
Memento, 1977–79*
Graphite on paper, 3 × 9½ inches
Mr. and Mrs. Gary Golkin

51
Untitled, 1977–79*
Graphite on paper, 5⅜ × 8 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

52
Untitled, 1977–79*
Graphite on paper, 2⅝ × 3⅜ inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

53
Hierophant, 1955–79*
Oil on canvas, 38 × 30 inches
Private collection

54
Aegis, 1955–79*
Oil on canvas, 24 × 20 inches
Collection the artist, courtesy R. Bellamy

Photography Credits

Rudolph Burckhardt:
catalogue nos. 6, 7, 15, 16, 17, 18
1954 Untitled Myron Stout painting (fig. 1)
1961 Green Gallery group show (fig. 2)

Geoffrey Clements:
catalogue nos. 31, 32, 33

Rachel Giese:
two portraits of Myron Stout

Robert E. Mates:
catalogue nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34, 37, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52

Nathan Rabin:
catalogue nos. 35, 36, 41

Charles Uht:
catalogue nos. 38, 39, 40

Bill Witt:
Hans Hofmann teaching (fig. 4)
Myron Stout, summer of 1950 (fig. 3)

27. *Untitled*, 1964